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HER SHADOWED LIFE

BY
BEATRICE
MAREAN



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“Side by side near the banks of the brook, a young girl and a young man are seated.”—Page 5.

HER SHADOWED LIFE

A ROMANCE OF ST. AUGUSTINE

BY

BEATRICE MAREAN

AUTHOR OF "THE TRAGEDIES OF OAK HURST."



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Her Shadowed Life.

TO MR. HENRY M. FLAGLER

St. Augustine's friend and benefactor who has adorned her ancient streets with imposing edifices commemorative of the 16th Century, and of the genius and art of the Spanish race; thus with rare taste adding new grace and dignity to the historic town, the former glory of which is 'a tale long told' without detracting in the least from its charm of antiquity, or true elements of poetry; this romance, the shifting scenes of which, transpired in both the old town and the new, is respectfully dedicated by
THE AUTHOR.

“In the realm of flowers, a perfumed land,
Girt by the sea, by soft winds fanned;
Ravaged by war in years grown old,
Its former glory a tale long told,
Stands the quaint old Spanish City.

The scene of many a hard fought fight,
Of many a siege, when Spanish might
Was o’er the land: in its decay
It hath a beauty to live alway,
That quaint old Spanish City.”

HER SHADOWED LIFE.

CHAPTER I.

AN autumn day, soft and dreamy, in the mellow light of an Indian summer sun.

All about are the rich and varied tints from the brush of the Great Artist which has touched the quivering foliage of the grand forest trees into the harmonious coloring with which Nature loves to deck herself in readiness to receive King Winter, when he comes with his icy breath and mantle of snow. The sound of dropping nuts is heard, while russet, and yellow, and crimson, and brown leaves sail airily downward, and go floating away upon the bosom of a clear murmuring brook, which ere long will have its lullaby hushed in the cold arms thrown about it by the despotic king whose near approach has already been signaled by the death of many a flower and tender shrub.

Side by side near the banks of the brook, a young girl and a young man are seated upon the prostrate body of a grand forest monarch which some passing storm had uprooted, and left to die an ignoble death upon its bed of clay.

Surely not more than sixteen short summers had touched the brow of the fair girl, who is looking up into her companion's face with eyes all aglow with love's devotion. But, despite the love-light shining in those tender blue orbs, if we gaze into them as the young man near by her side is doing, we will detect some troubled shadow of remorse or anxiety which tells of a mind or conscience not wholly at rest ; and, if we pause in idle curiosity to listen to the low words the cherry lips disclose, we will be convinced that conscience and love are holding a terrible warfare within the gentle breast of this being, who should have been shielded in this, the innocent and confiding day of her youth, from all such temptation as at this moment is besetting her, and will ere long claim her as its victim.

"Darling, surely if you love me with one hundredth part of the devotion I lavish upon you, you would not hesitate to be guided by my advice, and be bound to me before I leave you with the golden chain fashioned by the Hand of God for the binding together of all such loving hearts as ours, and which no hand but His has any right to sever."

"Herbert, can it be possible that you doubt my love for you?" she asked with a pitiable quiver in her voice, which reminded one of a grieved child's.

"Oh, you love me as much as women love men generally, I suppose," he replied, and into his tone a taste of bitterness had crept. "But you do not love me well enough to yield to my earnest entreaties. In this I repeat that your love does not equal my own for you. There is no sacrifice under heaven, precious one, that I would not gladly make if thereby your

happiness or welfare might be increased," he ended passionately.

"Then trust me, and be content to defer our marriage until you have finished your studies, and I have completed my school-days, and have reached a proper age when a girl should become a wife," she pleaded.

"I believe that I may safely trust you, sweet one, but not the circumstances which will no doubt be brought to bear upon you after I am gone. No, I am convinced that if I must bid you farewell before the holy vows are taken which will make us husband and wife, it will be forever. So there is only one more short month of happiness for me in this life; for with that month expires my vacation, and I must return to my arduous studies, with a heart made heavy and sad by the conviction that my little love would not trust herself wholly to me, for fear, perchance, that I may be a villain, and prove false to my vows to her in the two weary years which must elapse before I can openly claim her as my own."

Oh, cruel shaft, sent with unerring aim! How it pierced the quivering heart of the young victim, and broke away the barriers of resolve behind which it had fondly hoped it was safely entrenched!

CHAPTER II.

A TINY wooden chapel, unpainted and unadorned, save for the gilded cross raised above the roof, and its few windows of stained glass. Enter this small inclosure, dear reader, ascend a pair of wooden steps, cross a small vestibule, and stand beside me within the gloom of the small sacred edifice. At first, perhaps, you think the place is empty of any human presence, until the solemn voice of a priest reaches our ears from the little chancel. We strain our eyes in the direction from which the sound emanates, and, as they become accustomed to the twilight of the place, we see a white-haired minister, clad in his robes of holy office, standing in the chancel with an open book in his hand, reading the marriage service to a man and woman who stand before him. The service proceeds. The ring is safely in its place upon the finger of the fair bride. "Until death do us part" is breathed scarcely above a whisper. Then the prayer and benediction, and we stand aside as the newly-wedded pair slowly turn and come down the narrow aisle and step out into the bright sunlight of a November day. One glance into the radiantly happy face of the groom, and we scarcely need let our eyes wander to the face of the fair blushing bride by his side to know that the ardent lover pictured in

the preceding chapter has won the day. True, the strictest privacy in all things regarding the marriage had been preserved. Nevertheless, the vows just breathed in this unfurnished, unpretentious church, before the man of God whose earthly pilgrimage is almost finished, and witnessed by none but the sexton and his wife, both wrinkled by time and bowed by age, are just as binding in the sight of God and man as if the greatest pomp and wedding pageantry had attended the joining of those two hearts which were henceforth "to beat as one." The place was a wild and sparsely settled one in a new western state. The few houses which clustered themselves together scarcely deserved the name of a village. Its one long straggling street with its few shops and one store, and blacksmith shop, with a country team tied here and there, certainly was not a picture of enterprise, nor gave a glimpse of the prosperous city that was destined at no very distant day to erect its tall spires, and steeples upon this spot, now known only as a small trading-post for the adjacent country.

Situated about a mile from the place we have described, stood a low, wide brick house, with a well-kept grove of natural forest trees standing to its right, and a bright green lawn to its left. The grounds surrounding the house were well kept, and, in summer time, were made bright by the great variety of perennial flowers and plants which flung out their rich coloring against the dark vivid green of the well-kept sward. In the rear of the house, the grounds gradually sloped away into a deeply wooded ravine, where a purling brook ran over a pebbly bottom, laughing and babbling on

its way to mingle its tiny stream with the great father of waters. Seventeen years prior to the opening of this story Mr. Oliver Mansden, a gentleman from Maryland, had bought the ground where this modest and homelike house stands, and had, after erecting the house and making some other improvements, been joined by his young wife and mother, and an orphan-girl whom the family was rearing. The family had taken up its abode in the new house, and lived in an atmosphere of quiet refinement, which marked the inmates at once as superior in many respects to their uncouth country neighbors. But brief had been their domestic happiness, which at the outset had bid fair to be of long continuance in this new home of their adoption ; for, in less than twelve months after the family's arrival, Mr. Mansden sickened and died. In a few weeks, he was followed into the realms of the great unknown by his wife, who never recovered from the shock of grief caused by the death of her tenderly loved husband, from whom not even the rude hand of death could long separate her. She left a tiny baby girl behind her, now bereft of all her kindred except her grandmother, whose feet were rapidly treading the incline which leads to old age. The old lady strove, however, to fill the parents' place to the little orphan as far as lay in her power. She conscientiously and tenderly reared the beautiful babe, and when it attained a proper age, engaged a governess to take charge of the child's education.

Thus the girl had passed her rather uneventful life until, at the age of sixteen, chance—if anything may correctly be attributed to chance—brought about a meeting between her

and Herbert Raymond, a young college student, who had been banished to western wilds in consequence of failing health, and was spending a few weeks in the vicinity of Leah Mansden's home. The young man had slightly wounded his hand one day while out gunning in the woods adjoining the Mansden home, and in consequence had called there for assistance. The moment his artistic eyes fell upon the little wild flower safely sheltered beneath the loving grandmother's care, the pain of his wound was forgotten in his contemplation of the beautiful and innocent face of the girl whose lovely eyes were lifted to his face, filled with sympathy for the suffering his wound occasioned.

Thus the acquaintance which soon ripened into love began.

When this state of affairs was reached, the girl's governess, a cold, precise, and prudent lady, and one whom no one who knew her would ever dream of having had a love-affair of her own, went directly to Leah's grandmother, and made her acquainted with her apprehensions that the young people were growing too fond of each other's society. But the good old lady pished and pshawed the governess's fears to scorn.

"The idea of Leah being in love with any man," she said, indignant at the very thought. "Why, my dear Miss Pinkham, your fears are absurd; you forget that my granddaughter is but a child, a mere baby, in fact. In love indeed!"

The governess shook her head, silenced but not convinced by the grandmother's argument. But the old lady, despite

the incredulity with which she had met the words of the governess, had her own fears aroused by them to a degree that she never would have confessed even to herself. And as she tossed on her pillow that night she resolved to place her own surveillance over the young couple, to detect, if she might, any cause for Miss Pinkham's suspicions. She did not have long to wait, for not many days elapsed before she too was convinced that what she had considered nothing but the passing friendship of a day had ripened into a degree of attachment between the young people, which to her eyes was alarming in the extreme. Therefore she forthwith forbid Leah seeing the young stranger again, under any circumstances. To her surprise the young girl, who had always yielded to her wishes without question or demur, met this mandate with tearful protestations, all of which made Mrs. Mansden all the more determined to have her will obeyed. Leah was banished to her own room for the remainder of the day, and when Mr. Raymond called in the evening and inquired for Miss Leah, he was waited upon by Mrs. Mansden herself, who in her quiet, lady-like way frankly told him that his visits to her house must cease.

"Why, Mrs. Mansden," cried the young man, aghast at his banishment, "what have I done to incur your displeasure? Tell me at once, so that I may beg your pardon for any inadvertency of which I may unwittingly have been guilty."

"You have done nothing amiss," she answered in a kindly-meant tone; "but my having permitted my granddaughter to meet you upon such intimate terms of friend-

ship, from the first, has been an exception to the rule which I have made, that she shall not associate with young gentlemen until she has completed her education. You being a stranger, and entitled by this to our hospitality, coupled with the reason that Leah was enjoying a vacation from her studies, were the only reasons for my departing from my rule. But, now, Leah has resumed her studies and I do not wish her mind distracted by company. Therefore I must ask you to discontinue your calls."

"Mrs. Mansden," cried the young man passionately, fairly driven to this confession by the lady's firmness, "Leah and I love one another; you do not know the suffering you will inflict upon us both if you persist in your resolve to separate us."

This frank avowal fairly took away Mrs. Mansden's breath. She stared at the young man a moment in silence, and then said sarcastically :

"I hardly know which to admire most, your audacity or your frankness. So you have taken advantage of my confidence and hospitality by making love to my granddaughter, who is still a child, and wholly unused to the ways of men of the world. A fitting return for a gentleman to make for kindness shown him in good faith." And the speaker's fine old eyes flashed the indignation their owner felt upon the discomfited young man.

He did not quail, however, beneath their fire, but answered earnestly :

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Mansden; but will you not listen to my explanation before you condemn me too

severely? I love your granddaughter with as true and honest passion as man ever felt for woman. She is the first woman I ever loved. This love stole upon me unawares. I did not bid it come, neither have I the power to bid it depart. I have not asked her to be my wife, because I could not so forget my duty to you even in my passion. That Leah loves me with her whole heart I am convinced, and I beg your consent to our betrothal. I have already presented my credentials of character to you, and am able to refer you to some of the most prominent men of New York, who will gladly testify to the worthiness of my family and antecedents."

"Do you think me so devoid of conscience as to give my consent for this child to become betrothed to the first man whom she has ever known? What does she know of the world or of love? Simply nothing. You say she loves you; she does not even know what the word love means. She has only mistaken a passing fancy for love, and it would not only be doing her an awful injustice to permit a betrothal between you, but doing you a great wrong as well," she answered calmly.

"We are both willing to take all risk as to that," he replied eagerly.

"Would you wed an untaught child?" she asked.

"Only permit us to be betrothed," he pleaded, "and I will promise not to ask her to marry me for two or even three years."

Mrs. Mansden shook her head in a decided manner.

No, she would consent to nothing of the kind. In one

year more Leah would be sent away to school for three years, and then, after she had had one or two seasons in society in the city, if she still wished to marry Mr. Raymond and he wished to make her his wife, she would withdraw all objection to the match, she said.

In vain the young man pleaded and expostulated. Mrs. Mansden ~~was~~ firm in her decision, no matter how many hearts might be broken by it. Then the stolen meetings between the two young people were brought about which culminated in the secret marriage, upon which our story is founded.

CHAPTER III.

MRS. MANSDEN congratulated herself that she had so easily disposed of the love-affair between her granddaughter and Mr. Raymond. True, the young girl had rebelled at first and shed bitter tears over what she considered the cruelty of her grandmother's decision; but after a week or two spent in restlessness and sullen discontent, she had appeared to yield to the inevitable, with what Mrs. Mansden was pleased to mentally term the good grace truly indicative of her superior sense and wise training. After this the subject was not referred to between them, and a soft happy light came into the girl's eyes, and her demeanor was more quiet than of yore. She, moreover, was gentle and affectionate to her grandmother, and paid more than her usual deference to the old lady's every wish.

"What a lovely disposition the child has," Mrs. Mansden said fondly to Miss Pinkham a month later. "Many a girl would have grown stubborn and revengeful, or even eloped with the man whom she imagined she loved. While Leah has the good sense to see the wisdom of the probation I have placed upon her, and accepts it like the sensible girl she is. She will forget all about this silly love-affair in another month, if she has not done so already."

"By the way," returned Miss Pinkham looking up from her everlasting crochet work, "I saw Mr. Raymond this morning when I was at the depot. He drove up in the omnibus with his baggage, and I noticed that he bought a ticket for New York. So I suppose we have seen the last of him."

"I hope so, at any rate," replied Mrs. Mansden. "Did he speak to you?"

"No, he only raised his hat in passing. But he came late and had no time to lose, as the cars were already in sight."

"I wonder if Leah knows that he has gone without even attempting to bid her good-bye," said Mrs. Mansden, speaking more to herself than to her companion.

"I do not know," replied the other lady. "When I came home I found Miss Leah locked in her room, and when I rapped and told her that it was time for her to begin her lessons, she replied that she was suffering from such a dreadful headache that I must excuse her from lessons to-day. So I have not seen her or had an opportunity to tell her of Mr. Raymond's departure."

"Yes, the poor girl is quite sick. I went to her room to see her after I heard she had a headache, but she would not open the door for me, only begged to be let alone, saying that nothing but quiet and rest would relieve her. I offered, and even insisted upon sending for Dr. West, but she would not listen to it. If she is not better in the morning, however, I shall send for the physician at once. The child may be threatened with typhoid fever," said Mrs. Mansden nervously.

The next morning Leah appeared at the breakfast-table as usual. She was very pale, and under her lovely violet eyes lay dark shadows which told of a sleepless night. She greeted Mrs. Mansden in her gentle affectionate manner, and replying to inquiries regarding her health, said with an attempt at cheerfulness, "I am quite as well as usual this morning and shall have to do extra lessons to-day, I imagine, to make up for my lost time yesterday."

"You had better not tax yourself too severely, my love," replied Mrs. Mansden, "lest the headache comes on again."

The door unclosed and Miss Pinkham entered with her soft cat-like tread.

"I am so glad you are able to leave your room this morning, my dear," she said, addressing her pupil. "I trust that we shall be able to go through our lessons to-day."

Leah thanked her, and just then a woman of perhaps thirty-three years of age entered bearing the coffee-tray, and the family proceeded with breakfast. As this last-named person will play an important part in the following events chronicled in these pages, I will ask indulgence to further introduce her to the reader's attention.

At ten years of age Martha Moore had been left an orphan, without home, means, or friends, and young Mrs. Mansden had taken the child into the shelter of her own home, and been very kind to her indeed. She gave the orphaned girl a fair education, and, while bringing her up with gentle and refined manners, also taught her self-reliance and the art of good housekeeping in all its various branches. The girl had

not only proven an apt scholar, but had become deeply attached to Colonel Mansden and his good wife. The early death of her benefactors, when Martha had reached the age of fourteen years, had been a terrible grief to the young girl. She showed her love and gratitude, however, by remaining in the home they had left, with Mrs. Mansden the elder, and lavishing her devotion upon the orphaned babe, who in return loved her with an affection not even equaled by that she bestowed upon her rather austere grandparent. Sound judgment and practical sense were the chief characteristics of Martha's nature. Her only weak point lay in her over-indulgence in gratifying Leah's every whim as far as it was possible for her to do so. Her love for the child was something wonderful. She clung to her with an abiding tenacity that nothing could interfere with. Martha had, in her youth, many chances to marry, but for Leah's sake she refused them all, and devoted her life to the child, and never murmured at her lonely lot. Being aware of the love-episode between Leah and Mr. Raymond, Martha in her heart blamed Mrs. Mansden for the lover's banishment, and her sympathy was all on the side of the young couple, rendered miserable by the old lady's mandate. So it came to pass that during the few weeks which elapsed between Mr. Raymond's banishment from the Mansdens' home and his departure to New York, Martha had been made the confidante of the lovers; and, much against her better judgment, be it said, had been induced to aid them in bringing about their clandestine meetings. That matters between the two had ever reached even the thought of a secret marriage

never once occurred to the mind of the girl's faithful friend, who had nothing but Leah's peace of mind and ultimate happiness in view. The day of Mr. Raymond's departure for New York was spent by Leah in her own room, the closely-locked doors of which did not unlock to any one, not even to the affectionate pleadings of Martha.

Breakfast was over and Mrs. Mansden and the governess had gone out for a short drive before the lessons of the day were commenced. Leah often accompanied the two on these morning drives, but, begging this morning to be excused, she ran upstairs to her own room where she stood looking from her window across the lawn, which lay sparkling under the first heavy frost of the season.

A timid knock fell on her door, but she did not turn her head as she bade the intruder enter.

Martha came softly into the room closing the door behind her, and, turning the key in the lock, said with great concern in her voice as she stood by the young girl's side, "What can I do for you this morning, my precious one?"

"Nothing, thank you, Martha," answered Leah listlessly.

"You must try to cheer up," said the woman in a voice scarcely above a whisper. "Your grandmother is aware that Mr. Raymond left for New York yesterday, and if you continue to be so gloomy, she will be sure to think his going away is the cause of it."

"I do not care if she does," Leah said, turning to her friend with flashing eyes. "Indeed, I wish she might this hour be able to realize all she has made me suffer by her interference and obstinacy."

"Your grandmother thought she was acting for the best, my child," answered Martha soothingly.

"For the best!—Yes, the best for herself, and her own ambitious plans," returned Leah bitterly. "Martha," and the girl turned her pale face and flashing eyes full upon her friend's face, "I do not see how I am to continue acting the deceitful part I have acted towards my grandmother. Sometimes it seems to me that I must throw off the disguise which I have worn for weeks and let her see how much I blame and despise her for my unhappiness."

"Hush, hush, my darling," whispered Martha, surprised and shocked at the new spirit manifested in one so gentle as Leah had always been. "I am surprised at you—you who have always been so kind and patient."

"I do not feel either one or the other of these virtues this morning. I am so miserable. I wish I had eloped with Mr. Raymond as he wished me to do." And the girl's eyes wandered out upon the lawn again.

"Eloped with him," echoed the now indignant Martha. "Did Mr. Raymond try to persuade you to elope with him?" And then, without waiting for an answer, she continued vehemently, "I know now that he is a villain, and I wish you had never seen his face."

"Martha, how dare you say such things to me, you who have been the only mother I ever knew, and one whom I have trusted in all things."

The voice, which had rung out in an indignant tone, began to tremble as if suddenly freighted with tears, and the harassed girl threw herself upon the bed and buried her face in the pillow.

“Do not be angry with me, Leah,” entreated Martha, as she knelt beside the prostrate form. “You know, or ought to know, that there is nothing in this world that I desire so much as your happiness. For this I have gone against my own convictions of right, and have aided you in the deception practiced against Mrs. Mansden in regard to your true feelings towards Mr. Raymond. Leah, dear, dear child, bear with me, for my heart is filled with misgivings as to the honor of the man whom we have so fully trusted.”

“I do not see any reason why you should have so suddenly become beset with apprehensions. Of what has Mr. Raymond been guilty that has shaken your faith in him?” And Leah turned her face from the protecting softness of the pillow as she listened eagerly for Martha’s answer.

“It was a discovery I made this morning” returned the other mysteriously.

“What did you discover?” and Leah raised herself to a sitting posture on the side of the bed, and looked nervously down into the upturned face of the woman kneeling beside her.

For answer Martha drew from her pocket a pair of gentleman’s riding gloves, and placing them on Leah’s lap, said sadly, “I found one of these in your room this morning, Leah; the other one just outside of the window on the ground, lying in the track made by a man’s boot. There can be no mistake as to whom the gloves belong, as they both bear Mr. Raymond’s name inside. Leah, do you now blame me for losing confidence in Mr. Raymond’s honor?”

A crimson tide of shame crept over the girl’s face at the

sight presented to her vision. For a moment it lingered there painfully and then receded, leaving her pale and calm.

“Think of the awful consequences, Leah, had your grandmother or your governess made this discovery instead of myself. You would have been disgraced, and ruined, my darling; for I know Mrs. Mansden too well not to believe that with this evidence of your guilt she would have driven you forever from her sight.”

“Not if I had told her what I now intend to reveal to you, Martha, for no human being shall question my virtue as long as I live to defend it,” replied the girl proudly. “I admit that Mr. Raymond not only visited me in my own room the evening before he left this place for New York, but confess that he has frequently done so within the last two weeks. I also declare with my right hand upraised to heaven that he had a perfect right to do this, for Herbert Raymond is my lawful husband.”

CHAPTER IV.

MARTHA started to her feet and stood gazing dumfounded at Leah, as though she thought the girl had become suddenly insane.

To hear this girl, whom Mrs. Mansden considered but a mere child, and not old enough to even think of entering into a marriage engagement, declare in a calm clear voice which carried conviction with it to her hearer's heart, that she was already a wife, for a moment paralyzed the good Martha with astonishment. Then a mighty fear swept over her that this innocent being had been inveigled into a false marriage by a designing villain, and she found her voice to say fitfully, "Oh, Leah, dear Leah, what have you been induced to do? Oh, my darling, my darling, you have been ruined by this scoundrel. I know you have. For how do you know you are legally married? He is only a stranger, and you are so young and innocent of the wicked ways of the world. Oh, my poor child, my poor child!" and Martha burst into a violent flood of tears, and wrung her hands in despair.

Leah went up and laid her arms around the distressed woman's neck, saying soothingly: "Do not be alarmed,

Martha ; you have no cause for fear. The only wrong I have done was to be secretly married to one of the best and most noble of men. This wrong must lie at my grandmother's door, since she, by her cruelty, forced me into its committal."

"How do you know that you are legally married, you poor thing?" reiterated Martha through her sobs.

"I will prove it to you, Martha, and then you will retract the unjust things you have said of my husband."

So saying, Leah proceeded to unlock a large trunk, and from its depths produced a folded parchment which she opened and displayed to the weeping woman. "Read this and put your fears forever at rest concerning the legality of my marriage. See, I was married by our own beloved rector, Mr. White. Here is his signature, with the names of the old sexton and his wife, Mackay, as witnesses. Are you convinced now, my good Martha?" and the girl smiled up into the tear-stained face of her faithful friend, but Martha continued to weep dismally.

"Do you know what this is? It is my wedding ring, Martha—my wedding ring;" and as she spoke Leah drew a diamond ring from where it had been hidden in the bosom of her dress, attached to a small gold chain, and slipped it proudly on her finger.

"No good will come of such a marriage, Leah, you will see; it will only bring you anguish and woe," Martha wailed, through her tears.

"Oh, do not prophesy such awful things," cried the girl, half impatient at the way her friend was disposed to view the

secret marriage. "What harm can come of it even if my grandmother should discover my marriage and turn me out of doors. I can start any day to join my husband. Bless him! you do not know how much he and I love one another, nor how good and noble he is."

"No truly good and noble man would have taken advantage of your youth, inexperience, and love for him to decoy you into a secret marriage," Martha returned sadly.

"Martha, I command you to hush! I will not hear my husband spoken of so unjustly," and Leah's eyes flashed ominously. "I had thought you were my best friend on earth, but I find even you will fail me when I most need your love and sympathy."

"Don't be angry with me, dear, or do me the injustice to think my love will ever fail you. While we both live, you shall ever be the dearest object in life to me. It is my great love for you, and anxiety for your welfare and happiness that causes my heart to be rent with apprehension for you," Martha replied sadly. "I have lived many years longer than yourself, Leah, and never yet have I known a secret marriage—and I have known many—that did not turn out badly. Remember, my child, that it is 'only a tangled web we poor mortals weave when we practice to deceive.'"

"Well, what I have done, Martha, cannot be undone. I have no fears about its consequences, so do not preach any more, but say you will forgive me, and keep my secret." Leah drew the sparkling gem from her finger as she spoke, and restored it to its hiding-place in her bosom; then began to fold up the marriage certificate preparatory to putting it

safely out of sight, for the two years it was to remain a buried secret.

“Forgive you? Why, my lamb, I have not blamed you at all. Mr. Raymond is the one who should not only be censured but punished for having persuaded you to act a dishonorable part towards your guardian,” Martha replied. But Leah held her finger up, and shook her head warningly.

“Leah,” pleaded the woman, after a few moments’ silence, “be advised by me, darling, and make such restitution as still lies in your power. Go at once to your grandmother, upon her return from her drive this morning, and confess your secret marriage. Do not deceive her longer; just think of the awful deceit which you shall have to practice in keeping your secret from her for two whole years. Oh, Leah, I entreat you, do not blacken your innocent soul by trying to live a double life. Confess all, and throw yourself upon Mrs. Mansden’s mercy. Then, should the worst come, I will myself take you to your husband, if you know where he is to be found.”

This earnest appeal struck a strange chord in the girl-wife’s heart, and something—perhaps it was the gentle voice of the spirit of her dead mother—admonished her not to let the advice which sprung from her loving friend’s heart go unheeded. She did not, however, answer Martha’s pathetic appeal, but, after depositing the marriage certificate in the trunk, stood looking out at the window, lost in reverie.

The gray lawn with its leafless trees lay bathed in a mellow cataract of autumnal sunlight before her eyes. A flock of tame pigeons were cooing and strutting about on the dry

grass, or stood stretching their white wings lazily in the grateful warmth of the sun's bright rays. A large white mastiff lay near them with his head on his paws, and watched the movements of the birds with great blinking eyes. A herd of sleek Jersey cows filed slowly past the gate, the bell on their leader tinkling musically on the still morning air.

"Leah, will you not take my advice?" and with the words of this appeal, Martha's kind eyes, red and swollen with recent tears, looked imploringly into the troubled face of the young girl.

"You must give me time for consideration, Martha," she answered wearily. "You certainly know that when once the vials of my grandmother's wrath are opened upon my defenseless head, it will be no light thing to endure."

The dog in the yard suddenly raised his head and sniffed the air, then sprang to his feet, and broke into loud barking. The pigeons rose with a muffled whir of their white wings, and sailed gracefully away through the clear atmosphere. A horseman galloped to the gate, hastily dismounted, threw the reins over the hitching-post, and, entering the gate, walked rapidly towards the house.

"Dr. West is coming," said Leah. "Go down and receive him, Martha. If he wishes to see grandmother, ask him to step into the parlor and wait. She will return from her drive presently."

"I hope," Leah said to herself as Martha left the room, "grandmother does not think that I need a physician's services, and has sent Dr. West to call on me. Oh dear! I am half inclined to take Martha's advice, and make a clean

breast of everything, and risk the consequences. Oh, grandmother's wrath will be something terrible! Well, there is one comforting thought,—if she denies me her forgiveness, I will go to New York and join my husband at once. I do hope, though, that she will not be very cruel and unforgiving, for I love her dearly, and she has no one to blame for my disobedience but herself."

The girl drew her wedding ring again from its hiding-place, and stood idly flashing the diamond in the sunbeams which streamed in at the window and fell around her like a mantle of light, as she communed with her own heart.

The door behind her unclosed, and Martha, reappearing, said :

"Doctor West has asked to see you, Leah."

"Why did you not tell him that I am not ill?" the girl asked emphatically.

"I did, but he said his call was not a professional one," Martha replied.

The girl hastily returned her wedding ring to its hiding-place, and descended to the parlor where the family physician was impatiently waiting her coming.

CHAPTER V.

‘GOOD-MORNING, Dr. West, I am pleased to see you;’ and Leah advanced and laid her small hand into the broad palm of the old family physician, whom she could not remember when she did not know and love. Dr. West returned the salutation, but his usual cheerful manner was absent, and in its place was the uneasy air of one who had a disagreeable duty to perform.

“Please be seated, Doctor,” the young lady continued. “I regret that my grandmother has not yet returned from her morning drive; she has been gone longer than usual this morning, and I am expecting her every moment.”

She drew aside the silken and lace drapery from the window as she spoke, and glanced down the road to see if the carriage might not be coming.

Instead of seating himself the visitor came and stood beside her, while he scanned the road a moment with an anxious look in his kind eyes. Then, turning suddenly, he took Leah’s hand and said gently

“My mission here this morning, my dear child, is a sad one, and I am at a loss to find words to prepare you for a sorrow which you must soon meet; and I hope you will have sufficient fortitude to meet it bravely, remembering that this

life is always beset with trials which may spring upon us without warning, at any moment, and we can only look for strength to bear them from the Great Hand which, no doubt, sends such afflictions upon us for our good, hard as they are to bear."

Leah listened, with eyes wide open in amazement, to this lengthy prologue, and at its close cried out anxiously, "Why, what do you mean, Dr. West?" and she grew pallid to the very lips as her thoughts flew to her absent husband. Was he ill or dying, and had he sent to bid her throw off all disguise and come to him at once?

"Oh, Doctor, something awful has happened. I know it by your words and manner. I pray you tell me at once, I can stand anything better than this awful alarm and suspense."

She pressed her hand to her heart, trembling visibly, and the physician led her to a sofa and gently forced her to be seated as he said, in a voice shaken by emotion :

"My poor child, can you bear it if I tell that you are now indeed alone, since God has seen fit to deprive you of your only natural protector, your only living relative?"

She looked pitifully up into the kind face bending over her.

"What do you mean?" she gasped with ashen lips; "only an hour ago my grandmother, apparently in the best of health, left the house for a short drive. Oh, surely nothing has happened to her in that short space of time?"

"Only what will sooner or later happen to us all, Leah," he returned very gently, as tears swam in his eyes. "Your grandmother is dead, my child."

"Dead, dead!" she gasped, as if the physician's words had bewildered her brain. "Why do you say this, Dr. West?" she cried at length. "It is a most cruel jest; my grandmother is alive and well. She will be here in a few moments, and reprove you for your cruel joke."

"Leah," he said sadly and impressively, "your grandmother will never reprove or applaud any one again in this life, for she died nearly an hour ago sitting in her carriage in front of my office, where she was waiting to speak to me concerning your own health."

The furniture in the room began to float before the girl's dazed eyes, and the physician's kindly voice grew lower and lower, until his last words fell on his listener's unconscious ears.

"Poor child, it is better so," said the physician to himself, as he took the light limp form in his arms and bore it upstairs.

After a few briefly spoken words of explanation he resigned the unconscious sufferer into Martha's kind care.

Two days later all that was mortal of Mrs. Mansden was laid to rest in the bosom of mother earth, and Leah was, as the physician had said, "indeed alone."

No mother could have more conscientiously fulfilled her duty towards her child than Mrs. Mansden had, according to her conception of right, filled a mother's place to her orphaned granddaughter.

True, she had been stately in her manner to the child, and inclined to be far more exacting in her old-fashioned ideas of propriety than modern mothers are. To this must be

attributed the first wrong step the young girl had taken in yielding to a secret marriage.

But Leah had bestowed upon her grandmother a wealth of love despite the firm discipline to which she had been subjected at her hands, and the lady's sudden death was a mighty grief to the young girl's affectionate heart.

She had received two letters from her young husband after his departure, one written *en route* to New York, and one on his arrival in that city.

They were both overflowing with expressions of love for the young wife from whom circumstances had so cruelly separated him, and he spoke fondly and repeatedly of the glad day when he might claim her as his own before the world. This last letter had reached her on the sad day of Mrs. Mansden's death,—this had sustained her in her sudden bereavement.

She could not write him on that day, or the next, but in a few days after Mrs. Mansden's funeral, when the kind neighbors had returned to their homes, and Miss Pinkham had been dismissed, and she was alone with the faithful Martha, she sent him a telegram informing him briefly of her loss, and then spent nearly the whole day writing to him, and imploring to be allowed to join him immediately.

She sent the dispatch early in the morning and directed it to the address in the city, which he had given her, but before noon of the same day it was returned to her with the information that the person addressed could not be found. Other telegrams were sent the next day, and the next, with the same result, and ere long the letters which she had

written and sent to the same address began to return as uncalled for. The days so filled with anguish for the young wife began to lengthen into weeks, with still no news to quiet the deadly apprehension which was lashing her soul into unrest.

“ Oh, Martha ! I know he is dead, for nothing but death would cause this silence.”

Then Martha, not daring to express the suspicions she felt concerning Mr. Raymond's integrity and honor, could only fold the poor, shivering, weeping child in her motherly arms, while her tears fell in a perfect flood of sympathy for the young being, who, her heart misgave her, had been deceived by a villain.

The annuity which had been Mrs. Mansden's, and which had enabled herself and granddaughter to live almost in luxury, ceased at the old lady's death. So now there was nothing left for the lonely orphan except the home left by her father and the personal property which had belonged to her grandmother.

Martha had saved a few hundred dollars of her own, and this she pressed upon Leah to use.

“ No, Martha, I will not use your money, dear good friend ; keep it for your own wants. The personal property which belonged to my grandmother must be sold, and will no doubt bring several hundred dollars, and I have one thousand dollars which my husband, God bless him ! gave me the day before he left ; and this will suffice for my needs until I can get some kind of employment.” And the tears gushed forth in a copious shower, as they ever did at the mention of

her young husband, whom she had really begun to mourn as dead. Two months more dragged their weary length by, and still no tidings came to the anxious women in the lonely home, to in any degree relieve the suspense which was becoming unbearable.

The personal property had been converted into money, and they had nothing to do but wait and pray for news that never came.

In Mr. Raymond's letter, written upon his arrival in New York, he mentioned that by his physician's advice he would not return to the northern medical college, where he had been in attendance when his health failed, but would matriculate at some college in the south, the exact location of which he had not yet decided upon, but would inform her as soon as his decision was made. Leah wrote to the college which Mr. Raymond had attended in New York, and to every college in the south of which she could obtain the address, but no student by the name she mentioned was in attendance at any one of them.

Driven to despair, Leah decided to leave her home.

"I shall go mad, Martha," she said, "if I remain here in this state of inactivity."

"Where do you want to go, my darling? Just name the place and I will go with you, even if it be to the wilds of Africa," said the faithful friend.

"I think I shall go to New York; perhaps I may get some clew there to the fate of my dear one."

"Well, to New York we will go then. It is a large city, and like all such, is filled with wickedness and selfishness. But

never fear, I will take care of you and guard you from harm, and we will not suffer as long as our money holds out, and when what we have is exhausted I will work for more," declared Martha, as she drew the young head to her motherly bosom and wiped Leah's tears away. "But you must not grieve and cry so much, dear," she continued. "It will do you no good; on the contrary, it will do you a great deal of harm, for it will not only spoil your good looks, but it will ruin your health. Things look rather dark, I'll admit, but we must be brave and meet such trials with courage, and God will provide ways and means for us if we are brave, energetic, and true. So cheer up now, dearie, and set to work and help me to get our things in readiness, and we will lock up the house with its furniture and go and stay, for a time at least, in New York, if you would rather go there," and Martha kissed the pale cheek of her darling and bustled away to begin preparations for their departure. Luckily for the sorrow-stricken and almost distracted young wife, Martha belonged to the noble type of womanhood which resolutely turns its face away from the shadows that often obscure life's pathway, and in her search for the silver lining of every dark cloud she always found peace for her soul, while with warm heart and energetic hands she set to work with slow but regular stroke to find the way out of every difficulty that confronted her. I am sure, had Martha been in our mother Eve's place when the edict went forth which banished our first parents from the Garden of Eden, she would have said cheerfully: "Well, Adam, it is pretty hard, I know; but we deserve it for our foolish disobedience, and

there is no use to spend time in fretting over what is past recall ; so cheer up, and we will go to work and make the most of the good things left to us."

And in the busy days which followed, while she strove with all her might and main to make a home on earth which should as nearly as possible resemble the lost Eden, she would have grown to believe that after all the banishment was for the best, and have found peace and contentment in the home which had been created, with God's favor, by her own and Adam's industry and frugality.

So in one week from the day that the decision had been made for the sojourn in New York, the key was turned in the lock of the old brick house where Leah's life had been spent, and the pair took the cars which were to carry them away from those familiar, pastoral scenes, for many and many a year.

CHAPTER VI.

IN a snug little cottage, surrounded by a small inclosed yard, situated within twenty minutes' ride of the great metropolis of New York, two women are seated in a tiny sitting-room in front of a coal-fire burning brightly in the polished grate.

The furnishings of the room were cheap and plain, but the scrupulous neatness and good taste that are not always shown amid such humble environments, would strike the eyes of the beholder at once, and bear evidence that the occupants of this humble apartment were people of refinement, although they might be the children of poverty. In a large wooden arm-chair, cushioned with bright chintz, and drawn near the fire, sat a young girl, holding tenderly in her arms a beautiful babe perhaps two months old. The fingers of her right hand were toying caressingly with the dark brown rings of silky hair which adorned the child's head, and ever and anon she pressed her lips to the warm velvety cheeks resting close to her bosom.

Her companion, a middle-aged woman with a most kindly face, let her eyes rest for awhile on the pretty picture presented by the young mother and child; then, with a smothered

sigh, she turned and took up some sewing which lay on the table, and, seating herself at a sewing machine which stood near the south window of the room, sat down to work, and soon the busy whirl of the machine fell upon the stillness of the room.

The young mother pressed the babe closer to her bosom and sat gazing into the glowing coals before her, as though she sought to read her destiny in their delicate tracery.

At length she arose and deposited her precious burden in the small wicker cradle which stood by her side, with furnishings downy and white enough to have held the slumbering form of a baby prince of the royal blood.

She tucked the little form snugly in its white flannels and pressed kiss after kiss upon its rosy cheeks. Then she went to the worker's side and resting her delicate white hands on the polished table of the sewing machine and leaning slightly upon it, said : "Martha, I have decided to answer the advertisement for a private secretary, and think I had best go at once while the baby is sleeping."

The woman addressed lifted a pair of troubled eyes to the young face as she answered : "I wish that I might be able to persuade you not to do this, Leah."

"But, Martha, how are we to live? Our money is almost exhausted, and we must work or starve," the girl said earnestly.

"If one of us must go to strangers for employment, Leah," Martha answered, "it seems more fitting that I should go, and let you remain at home and take care of the child. The furnished rooms we have let to the lady-teachers will bring enough money to pay the rent, and surely I can earn enough

at sewing or some other employment to defray our other expenses of living."

"No, no, don't mention such a thing," the girl cried, "I will never consent to stay at home, Martha, and permit you at your age to go forth and face the world for my sake. Dearly as I love my poor fatherless baby, I will place him in an orphanage before you shall take this burden upon yourself. You have already done a thousand times more for me than I shall ever be able to repay, and I should as soon think of sending my own mother out to seek employment to support me, were she living, as to permit you to do so. I am not sure I can get a position that I shall be able to fill satisfactorily, but I shall try, and if I fail the slave's life of sewing women is still open to us, and we will bring the work home and toil together."

The ring of decision in the young voice convinced Martha that further remonstrance would be useless, so she wiped the tears from her eyes which Leah's speech had caused to flow freely, and, getting up, went to a small wardrobe which stood in the room, and bringing the young woman's hat and cloak, began to prepare her for the object she had in view. But her tears flowed afresh as she looked into the pale delicate face before her, and thought of the trials in store for the young creature so unused to the selfish ways of the world.

"Poor child, poor child!" she murmured. "I never expected to see the day when it would be necessary for you to go out in a large city in search of employment. It almost breaks my heart."

"Why do you feel so badly about it, Martha?" replied

Leah as she drew on her gloves. "Am I better than thousands and thousands of other women who belong to the great army of bread-winners? Indeed I am not, nor yet half so good as many of them, for I brought my trouble upon myself, in a measure, by my own disobedience. Now dry your tears, dear, and do not pity me because I am willing to work. I should more need your pity were I not willing, or unable to help myself and you. Take good care of the little one; I shall not be gone long, and pray while I am absent that I may be successful in getting the position, instead of grieving because I have gone to try to secure it."

She stepped lightly to the cradle and bent fondly over the sleeping child for a moment, then kissing Martha affectionately, softly left the room, and in a moment the front door closed upon her, and Martha from the window stood watching the slender, graceful form of the young girl as she bent her footsteps towards the busy bustling city.

It was a beautiful day in early winter. The air was crisp and bracing. The sun hung midway in a cloudless sky, and the fallen leaves rustled beneath the girl's quick footsteps as she sped along with a prayer in her heart that the situation for which she was on her way to apply might not ere this have been granted to some other more fortunate applicant.

Martha replenished the smoldering fire in the grate, and softly swung the cradle, the occupant of which had begun to stir uneasily upon its snowy pillows. The babe slept again, and the woman stooped and picked up the morning edition of the New York *Herald*, from where Leah had dropped it beside the baby's cradle, and after having ad-

justed her eye-glasses, she ran her eyes over the want column until they fell upon the advertisement for a female secretary, to answer which had been Leah's business to the city this morning.

"Wanted"—she read—"A young woman of pleasing manners and refined breeding, who would be willing to go south with her employer as private secretary and companion to a lady. To the right person a good home and generous salary will be given. References given and required. Apply to Room 27, Astor House."

"Leah surely did not notice that references were required of the applicant," mused Martha, "for these she is fully aware she cannot furnish. Poor girl!" and Martha fell into a painful train of thought concerning the hard lines which had fallen to the lot of her darling.

The lengthening sunbeams stole in through the parted muslin curtains and lay in a mellow shaft of brightness upon the cheap ingrain carpet. The small clock on the mantel ticked noisily on, measuring off the seconds, minutes, and hours which come and go despite all earth's sorrows and perplexities.

A jar of mignonette blooming on the window-sill filled the room with a sweet fragrance, while a canary bird, which had been left in the room for safe-keeping during its owner's absence, by one of the young lady-teachers occupying the room above, burst forth into shrill trills and quavers which made the sleeping babe sigh and move uneasily in its downy nest.

One year had elapsed since Leah and her faithful friend

Martha Moore had bidden farewell to the red brick house which so long had been their home in the western town.

They came directly to New York and rented the cottage where we now find them. They had money enough to defray their modest expenses for a year, and Leah fondly hoped that long ere that time should expire she would find her husband, or at least find some clew that would lead to the discovery of his fate. She had his parents' New York address, although, following his request at parting, she forbore to address him at his home. Upon her arrival in New York she resolved to arm herself with her marriage certificate, go boldly to his parents, and demand news of her loved one, for she was almost mad with anxiety concerning her husband's fate. She was thankful that her spotless character she could prove even to the most exacting stranger.

So she had resolved to lay bare to them the story of her early wooing, which resulted in a secret marriage to their son, together with her husband's mysterious disappearance and silence since his arrival in New York. The second day after her arrival in the city, accompanied by Miss Moore, she called at the elder Raymond's residence. They found the elegant home, situated on an aristocratic street, closed and deserted. In despair Leah called upon a noted detective, whose aid she sought in ferreting out the case.

The detective's fees, however, were large and the girl-wife's means were small. So every circumstance combined to keep her in ignorance in regard to a matter of vital importance to her future welfare.

To Martha's suggestion that Leah insert a notice in the personal column of some daily paper hoping that it might meet the recreant's eye, she at last yielded a reluctant consent. When the notice appeared again and again, however, without eliciting a reply, the girl said sadly to the disappointed woman, "I knew that it would be useless. If my husband were living he would have remained true to me."

Martha and Leah formed no acquaintances, and lived as much apart from the busy throng surrounding them as if they were still isolated in the wilds of their far-away western home.

The only recreation in which they indulged was an occasional walk in a pretty park situated not far distant from their cottage.

During those walks they repelled all overtures for acquaintanceship made by other frequenters of the place so coldly and decidedly that the attempts were never renewed.

Leah's childish beauty was fast being replaced by the riper beauty of young womanhood, and many were the curious glances directed towards this beautiful and mysterious young person, who, attired always in a dress of black, held herself so proudly aloof from the world around her. Ere long, to Leah's dismay and Martha's grief, the unwelcome fact was forced upon them that to the unhappy young wife would soon come the care and responsibility of motherhood. It was now the good sense of Martha and her courageous nature came to the front, enabling her to shield and sustain the girl, whose one false step was already yielding such a bitter harvest of care and sorrow.

To the physician who had been summoned in attendance upon Leah, and the only person who was permitted to intrude upon the privacy of the two women's lives, Martha explained that the patient was a young widow bereft of her husband in the first month of her married life. The physician may or may not have accepted the elder woman's explanation as true.

If, however, he surmised that this case was only that of "another unfortunate," who had loved not only unwisely but too well, the suspicion was safely locked in the repository of his warm, true heart, kept sacred to his professional secrets, and he gave no token of his incredulity of Martha's statement.

His business was to aid, soothe, and sustain the helpless young sufferer through the peril of this crisis in her life, and not to pry into the secrets of her past, or add to her present sorrow by the manifestation of any uncharitable suspicion which might lurk in his breast.

CHAPTER VII.

WHEN Leah reached the Astor House, with a loudly beating heart she ascended the marble steps and made her way to the magnificently appointed office. Seeing a clerk who happened at that moment to be at leisure, she approached him and asked to be shown to room 27. The man eyed her sharply, then calling a bell-boy directed him to conduct the lady to room No. 27.

The boy bowed, and motioning the lady to follow him, stepped into the elevator, which soon landed them on the second floor; and in a moment more Leah stood in the lofty corridor in front of the designated number. The door opened in answer to her timid tap, and a fine-looking gentleman stood before her.

He was perhaps thirty-five years of age, very stylishly dressed, and with the ease and bearing of a perfectly well-bred man.

"I have called in answer to the advertisement for a private secretary," Leah said in a low voice, while her heart-beats quickened until they were audible to her ears.

The advertisement for a private secretary?" he asked, in rather a bewildered way, and then, as if suddenly remembering something which he had for a moment forgotten, he



“This young lady has called in answer to your advertisement.”—Page 47.

added, "Oh, yes ; I beg your pardon. I had forgotten that my wife advertised for a companion or something of the sort. Pray walk in, miss, and I will inform my wife of your call."

The room Leah entered was a luxuriously furnished private parlor.

The gentleman motioned the caller to a chair, and crossing the room with noiseless footsteps, disappeared behind a heavy portière which concealed a doorway from view.

In a few moments he returned, and approaching Leah, who had risen to her feet at the gentleman's reappearance, said kindly: "You may come with me at once, if you please, madam. The lady will receive you in her own room."

He pushed aside the portière and Leah followed him into an elegantly appointed bedroom.

"My dear," the gentleman said, approaching a small delicate-looking woman seated near a window with some sheets of manuscript in her hands, which she had evidently been reading, "this young lady has called in answer to your advertisement of this morning."

The lady looked up and smiled on the applicant, and the gentleman rolled a chair near where his wife was sitting and invited the young lady to be seated. Then, turning to his wife, he said tenderly, "My dear, I must really be off, or I shall be late for my appointment to meet the party of gentlemen at the Grand Central Hotel. I shall return in time to take luncheon with you. In the meantime do not exert yourself too much or we shall have you ill again."

He bent his handsome head over the small white hand of his wife which he had taken in his own as he spoke, and

touching his lips to it, laid it tenderly down ; then, bowing to the caller, he left the apartment, and soon Leah heard the front door close after him.

The lady laid down the manuscript, and turning a pair of lovely soft dark brown eyes upon Leah, said gently, "You came in answer to my advertisement ?" Leah bowed, and the lady continued : "What are your qualifications for the office you seek ?"

"I have had no experience in this capacity, madam," replied the applicant, "but I have a fair education, and understand French and German very well, am quick at figures, and write a fair hand," Leah replied modestly.

"You understand, of course, that the person whom I engage must be willing to accompany my family and myself to our home in Florida," the lady said.

"I understand, madam, and, should I be fortunate enough to please you, would be glad to accompany you."

The lady looked at her thoughtfully for a few moments and said : "Still, you appear very young to go so far from home with strangers, and perhaps leave your relatives behind you. I fear you might grow homesick."

"I have neither home nor relatives," the girl replied sadly.

"Indeed," said the lady sympathetically. "How long have you been an orphan ?"

"Since my infancy," was the reply.

"You have references, of course," said the lady. A faint blush mounted to the girl's face as she answered :

"I regret very much, madam, that I have not. I came to

New York from my western home in company with an old friend whom I have known all my life, and who has always been as a mother to me. Since we have been here, we have lived in great seclusion, so I know no one to whom I might apply for references. If, however," she added eagerly as the lady made no reply, "you would give me time, I can send to my old home, where many prominent people reside who will give you satisfactory evidence in regard to my character."

The lady smiled at the artless reply, and said: "Did I understand you to say that you have not been employed in any capacity since coming to New York?"

"I have not, madam. When I came here, I came on business, and did not expect to remain long in the city, but the business upon which I came detained me, and did not turn out as I had hoped it would; so now I am thrown wholly upon my own resources. It has only recently become necessary for me to seek employment. This is the first application I have ever made to any one."

"You will find my work rather hard," replied the lady. "Besides attending to a large correspondence you will be required to copy much manuscript, and write from dictation. I confess I am pleased with your appearance, and feel inclined to give you a trial any way, although I know in so doing I should be guilty of rather an unbusinesslike proceeding in thus taking you wholly on trust." She rose as she spoke, and going to a table, spread out a small portfolio, and placing pen and ink beside it said gently, "Will you kindly give me a specimen of your penmanship?"

"Certainly, Madam." And Leah rose with alacrity, and, pulling off her gloves, sat down and dipped the pen in the ink.

"Please write your name and address."

The girl wrote :

"LEAH MANSDEN,
"4177 COTTAGE GROVE AVE.,
"NEW YORK."

"Now write my name and address as I shall give it to you," continued the lady.

"MRS. GEO. GILBERT,
"ST. AUGUSTINE,
"FLORIDA."

"There," laughed the lady as she took up the sheet and examined the writing critically, "we have killed two birds with one stone, as the old saying goes, for here I have a specimen of your penmanship, and we have each other's name and address. You write a very good hand, Miss Mansden ; neither too large nor too small."

"I am happy that my penmanship pleases you, Mrs. Gilbert," the girl said, her heart warming towards the charming lady who seemed inclined to deal so generously with her, and whose kindly manner had put her so much at ease.

"If I were to engage you," said Mrs. Gilbert, "how soon could you be ready to accompany me south ?"

"In a very few days," Leah answered promptly.

"Now, one thing more ; we have not yet spoken in regard to

the salary. If I find a young woman who can fill the position satisfactorily, I will give her a comfortable, pleasant home and a salary of one thousand dollars per annum. Her hours of labor will be from ten A. M. to four P. M. and aside from this the time shall be her own, unless I should desire her to read to me. By the way, Miss Mansden, is reading aloud one of your accomplishments ?”

“Of this you will have to be your own judge, Mrs. Gilbert, after you have heard me make the attempt,” replied the girl modestly.

“Suppose you allow me to judge now,” the lady answered. Picking up a book of poems which lay on the table, and opening it at random, she handed it to Leah and then sat down, leaning her elbow on the table and resting her head on her hand, prepared to listen. In a clear, sweetly modulated voice Leah read :

“ We shape ourselves the joy or fear
Of which the coming life is made,
And fill our future atmosphere
With sunshine or with shade.
The tissues of the life to be
We weave with colors all our own;
And, 'in the field of Destiny, we
Reap as we have sown.”

She paused and glanced up from the page before her, into the kindly face of the listener, and the lady noted the sudden pallor which overspread her face.

“You read very well,” she commented, “very well, indeed. “Let me hear you again, please.”

The melodious voice again broke the silence—

“ The dear God hears and pities all,
He knoweth all our wants;
And what we blindly ask of him
His love withholds or grants.
And so I sometimes think our prayers
Might well be merged in one,
And nest and perch, and hearth and church
Repeat, ‘ Thy will be done.’ ”

The young voice trembled slightly when the last stanza was reached, and Mrs. Gilbert took the book from the reader's hand and returned it to its place on the table.

“ You are indeed a beautiful and touching reader,” she said kindly. “ Thank you very much. I have your address here,” referring to the paper she held in her hand, “ and will let you know my decision in regard to the engagement to-morrow morning. I would engage you at once, but I have made it one of the rules of my married life to never take any step of even small importance without first consulting my husband. In the meantime, you will also have time to think over it and decide whether you are pleased with the salary I offer and with the requirements of the position.”

The lady rose as she spoke, and Leah, feeling that the interview was at an end, rose also. Mrs. Gilbert accompanied her to the hall-door, opened it for her to pass out, and shook hands with her as she bade her good-morning ; and Leah was soon on the busy street, with footsteps bent in the direction of her cottage home.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE clock was striking the hour of noon when Leah, with her delicate face flushed from her rapid walk in the cold, crisp morning air, entered the cottage sitting-room where the faithful Martha still sat with her hand on the baby's cradle. The beautiful rosy child still slept, smiling often in its peaceful slumber.

Sleep on, beautiful child, happy in the dreams of thy innocent infancy, watched over by the holy angels who would gladly shield thee from all harm and keep thee as pure and innocent as thou art now. As yet thou art as happy as those heavenly visitors bending over thee. Alas, that the day must soon come when the storm-clouds which are even now gathering upon the horizon of thy young life will burst upon thee !

Martha placed a chair before the fire, and when Leah had wearily thrown herself into it, she took off the girl's hat and smoothed down her disordered hair with tender hands as she asked,

"What success did you have, dear?"

"Better than I had expected, Martha," she answered hopefully.

"Tell me all about it," said Martha eagerly, and her hands

paused in their caressing touch on the silky hair as she listened for the answer.

"I have not as yet secured the situation, but the lady to whom I applied gave me reason to hope that I would be engaged," and then Leah gave her friend a minute account of her morning's mission.

"Did you tell Mrs. Gilbert that you were a widow and also a mother, Leah?" asked Martha at the end of the girl's recital.

Leah's eyes fell before the questioning ones of Martha, and a burning blush suffused her face as she replied in a choking voice:

"Martha, I could not tell her that—it would involve too much. I was thinking all the way home, and only one way seems open to me: that is for you to keep house and take care of the child, dear friend, even as you did of his unfortunate mother before him. If I secure the position I shall get a generous salary, and you shall have it all except the small sum I shall require for my actual necessities. I shall make arrangements soon to have you both follow me to the south, so I may come to see you often; for the lady said that except when she might require me to read to her, the time would be my own after four o'clock in the afternoon. Then I shall always have Sunday to spend with you and my darling baby. Will you do this for me, Martha? Dear, dear Martha, to whom I already owe so much, can you do this much more for me?" and the tender blue eyes, with their long dark lashes wet with tears, looked appealingly into the face of their only friend.

"You know, my darling, that there is nothing within my power which I would not undertake for your dear sake," the woman replied, "but you also know, dear, that I have a horror of deception in any form. If you will take my advice, you will—if Mrs. Gilbert sends for you—lay your whole past history before her, omitting nothing whatever that the accidental discovery of would cause you shame and humiliation. Tell her all about your secret marriage, show her your marriage certificate and wedding ring, and tell her of the mysterious disappearance of your husband, and of the birth of your child. You have done nothing, dear, that you need be ashamed to acknowledge, except having made a secret marriage, and there can be no disgrace attached to that. Tell the lady that I will take care of the child, and pledge yourself to a faithful performance of your duties while in her employ, and trust me, Leah, that her woman's heart will be so stirred with pity for your unfortunate lot that she will be more likely to engage you than she is now, when she knows nothing about your sorrow."

"Martha," Leah replied, "all women are not kind and sympathetic as yourself, and in all probability a recital of my misfortunes would have the effect to make Mrs. Gilbert distrust me and decide that she did not require my services. She would say at once, 'A girl who could so wantonly deceive her natural guardian is not worthy of trust,' and that would be the end of it. The keeping of my past life a secret from my employer can in nowise affect her. I owe her no explanation of any folly into which I may have been led. As long as I know my character is pure, and am faithful in

the discharge of my duties, as her hired servant, what has she to do with my past?"

And against all Martha's remonstrance and wise advice, Leah remained firm in her decision to still keep the mantle of secrecy thrown over her unfortunate marriage.

Martha shook her head, and sighed wearily. "No good will come of this deception, Leah. Believe me, it will only bring more sorrow to your lot."

The look of distress that swept over the sweet young face at the prophecy so moved the good woman's heart that she kissed the quivering lips contritely, and resolved to hold her peace and let the girl use her own judgment in regard to the matter.

So another link was added to the chain which Leah had, with her own hands, forged, and the galling weight of which must be borne by her for many a weary year.

A note came from Mrs. Gilbert the next morning, saying that she had decided to engage Miss Mansden in the capacity of private secretary and companion, and named the date when the family would start for their Florida home. Miss Mansden might join them at their hotel at once, or she might, if it best suited her convenience, join them upon the day of their departure, which was a week later. The lady further added that all the expenses of the secretary's journey would be defrayed, and the amount would be deducted from her salary.

Leah's heart almost failed her now that she knew the affair was settled between herself and Mrs. Gilbert, and the fiat had gone forth, that she should be separated from her child.

She pressed the little thing again and again to her aching heart, while her hot tears fell fast on the nestling golden head, so soon to be deprived of a mother's care. She was aroused from her grief by the voice of the practical Martha saying :

"You have chosen for yourself, Leah, and have already pledged your services to Mrs. Gilbert, so now that you have put your hand to the plough, you must not look back. You have only a week in which to complete your arrangements for your departure. Do not spend your time indulging in tears ; your lot is a very hard one I know, dear, but it may not be long that you will have to be separated from your child after all. Now cheer up, dear, and get to work and help me to get your things in readiness for your journey."

"But it seems so cruel of me to leave you here alone, Martha, besides burdening you with the care of the child," wailed Leah.

"Don't fret about me, dear ; I am perfectly capable of taking care of myself and the little boy. Our lease for the cottage does not expire for six months, and I have money sufficient for my needs for that length of time. Then we will be guided by circumstances."

"If I am successful in this position I am about to take, I will send for you and the baby in two months at least. You will have no trouble to sublet the cottage and furniture, and I will have another place provided for you when you come to Florida," Leah answered more hopefully.

The week of preparation passed quickly, and with many a

heartache to poor Leah, but Martha gave her little time to brood over the early parting.

Active employment, in this good woman's opinion, was the panacea for all grief, and she took care that the sorrowful young mother was provided with something to do every hour in the day. But when the tender shades of night descended upon the scene of the busy preparations, and Martha, tired out with the duties of the day, slept the sleep of one whose conscience was at rest, Leah would steal softly from her couch, and taking the warm sleeping form of the babe in her arms, clasp it to her bosom, and stifling the sobs that seemed to be bursting her very heart-strings, weep such bitter tears over her unhappy lot that the very angels from heaven, who, while watching over earth's pilgrims, know that great trials must come to all such, must have sighed in sympathy for the young mother's sorrow.

The day of parting came at length, and Leah, with a white determined face, gave her babe the farewell embrace and laid him in the loving Martha's arms, and with tearless eyes, the fountains of which had already been wept dry, turned away, and, entering the waiting carriage, was driven away to join her new-found friends at the Grand Central depot, and the journey southward was begun.

CHAPTER IX.

ACCOMPANY me, dear reader, to the historic town of St. Augustine, where the sky arches delicately blue and as soft as that of Seville; where the sunlight is warm and golden, and where the heavens are radiantly beautiful by night, and the full moon floats majestically above the southern Atlantic coast.

On Cathedral Street, a quarter of a century ago, stood an elegant villa, with its luxuriant grounds and garden overlooking the Plaza, a pleasing bit of greensward situated in the center of the town. The house itself is worthy of description, and was at the time of its erection the most elaborate and pretentious ever built in this queerly-built old city, "which has stood the vicissitudes of three centuries of battle and change."

Strictly Moorish in design, and built of massive concrete, the walls had the external appearance of granite with all its durability. The building was surrounded on all sides by wide, cool galleries, while within the rooms were large and lofty. The adornment and furnishing of the house throughout was unique and tasteful, and richly illustrated the beauties of Moorish colors and designs. The pleasing effect of the interior of this beautiful home was heightened by the tropical

foliage and fruits which grew in wild luxuriance in the large grounds surrounding it.

Amid the rich foliage of the orange, lemon, magnolias, myrtles and palmettoes, southern song-birds sang their melodious songs, while in the space devoted to flower-culture sweet flowers bloomed and dropped their fragrant petals and bloomed again throughout the whole glad year.

To this ideal southern home which he had built and adorned about the close of the civil war, Mr. Gilbert, a private banker of St. Augustine, had brought his bride, a lady richly endowed with nature's most choice gifts.

Mrs. Gilbert had from her birth seemed to be one of fortune's especial favorites. No storm-cloud of sorrow or misfortune had ever descended upon her serenely beautiful life. She was the only daughter of wealthy and aristocratic parents, who lavished upon her a wealth of love, and all that unlimited means could command. At the completion of her twenty-first birthday, she had become the wife of the man of her heart's choice, and with him had taken up her residence in this ideal home, surrounded as it was by a spirit of romance which well suited her dreamy and poetical nature.

Possessing marked literary ability, with a taste for brain-work, she had enriched the literary world with many charming productions in both poetry and prose.

Mrs. Gilbert was a living example of how a woman may be a loving and tender wife, an ideal housekeeper, and a loyal friend, and still find time to devote several hours each day to some chosen work by which the world at large might be edified or benefited. Hours which many a woman, situated

amid luxurious ease as was Mrs. Gilbert, would have spent, either dawdling over useless fancy-work or in idle gossip, were by this charming woman, devoted to literary work ; giving to the world with generous hand rich treats from her own highly-cultured intellect.

Mr. Gilbert looked on and smiled, well pleased that his darling was happy in her own way. It was only after a season of unusually hard work on a production in which she was deeply interested, that he uttered his first protest as he noticed her pale cheeks and languid footsteps.

“ You are working too hard, my darling,” he protested. “ I will not permit you to write another line until you have taken a long rest, and the glow of health has returned to your pale face. Why, see how nervous you are ! Your hand is cold and trembling,” he added, taking the small white hand of his wife in his own.

“ Oh, that is because just now I heard a child scream in the street, and I imagined the poor little thing was hurt.”

“ When it was only laughing boisterously over something that pleased it,” he said laughing. “ Your imagining the child was hurt is only an evidence of your highly nervous state, which is a sure precursor of illness, if you do not turn resolutely away from your work and take the rest you stand so much in need of, and build up your shattered nerves by giving them a long rest. I am going to start for New York on Monday next ; this is Thursday, so you will have ample time in which to get ready to accompany me. I had thought of making it only a business trip, but if you will go with me I will arrange to make it one of pleasure, and will remain away as long as you are benefited by the change.”

“But I am anxious to finish this work before I leave. It will only take about two weeks more. Then I promise you I will not begin another book for a long time, or at least till I have your full consent to put myself in working-harness again,” she pleaded.

“Two weeks more,” he echoed, “and it will not take half that time in your present overworked state to prostrate you upon a bed of illness.” So, despite her pleadings, he remained firm, and the unfinished work was locked out of sight, while the author, with a sigh of regret, turned her back on her delightful unfinished task, and prepared to accompany her husband on his proposed journey.

After the business which had first been the object of Mr. Gilbert’s journey north had been disposed of, he gave himself up to pleasure, and, in company with his wife, flitted from one watering-place to another, or loitered about some famous mountain resort, until the cool winds and changing leaves of autumn caused the hearts of the travelers to turn longingly towards their sunny southern home. As they journeyed from the White Mountains to New York, Mr. Gilbert said :

“There is one thing that we must not neglect when we arrive in the city, and that is, to secure the services of a private secretary. For, if you are determined to work, you must have some one to help you.”

Thus it came about that the advertisement which had attracted Leah’s notice was inserted in the daily papers, a trivial matter in itself, but one which led to strange results in the life of our heroine.

CHAPTER X.

THE somber green of the grand old trees surrounding Myrtle Villa, the home of the Gilberts, was flooded with the rich after-glow of sunset, and tinged here and there with the faint blue shadows of twilight, as the travelers reached home.

To the artistic soul of Leah, whose eyes were feasting for the first time upon the rich and varied scene of a southern landscape, the picture was one of exquisite loveliness. "Could life be anything but a delight spent amid such environments?" she asked herself, as she descended the carriage-steps, and stood lost in admiration of the scene spread out before her.

"Is it not a lovely place, Miss Mansden?" Mrs. Gilbert asked proudly, as she noted the look of admiration on her secretary's face.

"Lovely does not express its grandeur, Mrs. Gilbert," the girl replied enthusiastically. "We have seen hundreds of lovely places on our journey hither, but this place is grand beyond description. There is nothing lacking in form or coloring to make the picture perfect."

"Miss Mansden, I must protest against your praises of our home, for my wife is already so much in love with it that it is almost impossible to get her to leave, even for a few weeks,"

Mr. Gilbert said laughingly. He had dismissed the carriage, and came up to where the ladies were standing in time to hear Leah's enthusiastic remarks.

"That is not to be wondered at, for your home is certainly a picture of the Garden of Eden," she replied.

"Without the serpent, let it be hoped," he said lightly, as he drew his wife's arm through his own, and led the way up the long avenue of trees to the house.

Charmed as Leah had been with the exterior of Myrtle Villa, the measure of her admiration was filled to overflowing when she beheld the interior; and in the few days following their arrival, which Mrs. Gilbert declared should be devoted to rest before commencing work, as the girl noted the sweet, even disposition of the mistress of the well-ordered household, she congratulated herself over and over again for the fortunate chance that made her a well-paid inmate of this ideal home. Then her thoughts wandered back to the beautiful babe she had left in the great city.

"Poor little thing," she murmured, "what a cruel fate overshadows it and its unhappy mother!"

What a contrast Leah's life has been to that of the gentle Mrs. Gilbert, whose life-lines thus far had run through sunny pastures rich in vernal bloom, with never a boisterous tempest to disturb the still waters of her peace, with never a storm-cloud to obscure the sunlight of her prosperity!

To this favored one no cruel partings had ever come, no heartaches, no shattered idols, no ghosts of vanished dreams, or buried happiness, rose like specters of the past to mock her with the drear hollowness of life.

One day, soon after their arrival home, the two ladies, who had been strolling about the shady streets of the quaint old city, entered the plaza and seated themselves within the pavilion to enjoy the refreshing breeze that came stealing up from the blue waters of the bay spread out before them.

A young couple, scarcely more than boy and girl, who had been strolling, lover-like, along the sea-wall, now descended its steps, and, making their way to the plaza, seated themselves not far from where Mrs. Gilbert and Leah were resting. The couple evidently belonged to the humble walks of life. As the girl, whose dreamy dark eyes and creamy complexion told of her Minorcan descent, seated herself, she reached her arms fondly for the beautiful babe the man was carrying. He placed his precious burden in his companion's arms, and, seating himself beside her, said in a voice loud enough to reach Leah's ears :

"It has been such a lovely day, Castillo, I'm sorry that you did not go on the excursion. You are staying at home too much ; you will lose all your pretty color, *ma petite chère*, if you stay within doors so much as you have done of late."

"I needs must stay with the little one, Mauricè," she replied, raising her head after kissing the dark hair of the child, and turning her wondrous lovely eyes upon her companion's face.

"Silly girl ; you could have left him in care of the mother for one day at least," he said, laughing at her serious face.

"Nay, Mauricè, not for one day would I leave my precious baby. How those rich ladies can go away pleasuring leav-

ing their little ones day after day to the care of others, is more than I can tell. Why, I should go mad if I could not see my boy every hour in the day," and the young mother pressed her rosy infant almost convulsively to her breast, while the husband laughed teasingly at the girl-wife.

A sob rose in Leah's throat as she witnessed the scene, and her heart-hunger for her own banished child became so overpowering that she grew sick and faint.

"To-morrow we will go to Fort Marion if the day is fine, and from its summit we can see the magnificent line of breakers over the bar."

Mrs. Gilbert slowly withdrew her eyes as she spoke from where they had been resting on the waters of the bay, now turned into a deep primrose by the rays of the setting sun, and as they fell upon her companion's colorless face she broke off her speech and exclaimed in alarm: "Why, Miss Mansden, are you ill? your face is colorless. What can I do for you, child?"

"Let us go home," the girl said wearily, as she staggered to her feet.

"But you are not able to walk, are you? Let me call a carriage," the lady said kindly.

"No, thank you, I shall feel better presently. It is only a faintness which often overcomes me without any apparent cause."

"You must consult a physician about those attacks," said Mrs. Gilbert thoughtfully, as the two walked slowly towards Myrtle Villa; but as she looked more closely into the young girl's face the lady noticed with fresh interest what she had

often noticed before—a deep shadow of sorrow was reflected in her secretary's beautiful eyes.

“A deep sorrow it must indeed have been to leave its impress upon one so young,” she mused as she walked by her companion's side. “I must try to find out as well as I can, without seeming to pry into her private affairs, what it is that troubles her. Perhaps I may be able to lighten the burden for her. Poor motherless girl!” and as Mrs. Gilbert's thoughts flew back to her own sheltered and happy girlhood, she resolved anew to be a friend as well as patroness to this friendless young girl, whom fate had cast in her way.

CHAPTER XI.

A MONTH of Leah's engagement with Mrs. Gilbert passed, bringing entire satisfaction to both parties.

"She is such a help to me in my work, and withal such a refined and interesting companion, that I do not see how I ever managed without her," Mrs. Gilbert said to her husband, when the two were alone.

"I am glad that you are pleased with her, my dear, and I hope you will have no cause to change the good opinion you have formed of her," Mr. Gilbert answered.

"Why, you have no presentiment that a disappointment is in store for me, in regard to her, have you?" she asked quickly.

"Oh, no," he said. "I have never thought much about it. Your secretary seems to be a very energetic, proper, and well-bred person. But she has a deucedly sad look at times when she thinks no one is observing her, which leads one to think that she may know more of the world than her youth would indicate. I wonder that you have not noticed it."

"I have noticed it often, and have been curious enough about it to ask her more questions than is pardonable, I fear, in regard to her past history; but the only motive for my impertinence was to try to help her shake this sorrow off, or to find a remedy for it," said the kind-hearted lady.

"And your efforts elicited nothing to guide you in your generous motive?" he asked, laying his paper down and

giving his whole attention to the subject which seemed to possess such interest for his wife.

“Nothing. All I have been able to learn, except what she told me at our first meeting, is that she has a friend in New York whose care she has been under ever since she left her home in the west. This woman, whose name is Miss Martha Moore, has, Miss Mansden assures me, held a mother’s place to her ever since her own mother died, and she loves her very much, although she is not a relative of hers. The thought occurred to me, that perhaps being separated from this friend might be the cause of the sorrow which the poor girl tries so hard to conceal,” Mrs Gilbert answered.

“The cause of your secretary’s sorrow, if she has one, comes from a deeper source than the one you surmise, depend upon it, little woman,” he answered. “But if you think this is the cause of her trouble, why not advise her to send for her friend to come and reside in St Augustine?”

“I suggested this, and even went so far, when she told me that the woman was a fine seamstress, as to propose that she should come and live with us in that capacity,” the wife replied.

“What did she say to the proposition?” he asked.

“After overwhelming me with thanks, she declined the offer, saying that her friend would never go from home to live with any one. She added, however, that the greatest desire of her heart was to rent a small cottage in St. Augustine, and send for Miss Moore just as soon as she was able to save money enough for this purpose.”

“Why, then, not have her send for her friend at once?” he asked with his characteristic earnestness, quick to take in-

terest in whatever interested his wife. "Palm Cottage on St. George Street is without a tenant, and has been for three months. Tell Miss Mansden that I will let her have it at reduced rent if she will take it at once."

"You dear, impulsive George," the lady said, getting up and slipping her arm around her husband's neck, and kissing his broad white brow fondly, "I know why you are so anxious to have this thing settled. You are apprehensive that if Miss Mansden does not have her old friend where she may see her every day, she will grow homesick, and I shall lose my companion, and secretary. But really, dear, don't you think we had better wait until we are better acquainted with Miss Mansden, and know for a certainty that she is precisely what she seems to be?"

"How unlike my wife to harbor suspicions against any one," he answered laughingly, as he drew her to a seat on his lap. "Have no fears, dearest; Miss Mansden is all right, I'll guarantee. So perfect your plans as soon as possible to remove any object from your way that might be the cause of you losing your secretary. Make her an advance on her salary if necessary. Then when her friend is safely settled at Palm Cottage, where she may see her every day, let us hope that the shadow of sadness, which has troubled you to witness, will roll quickly away from your secretary's horizon, to return no more."

The next day Mrs. Gilbert laid the matter before Leah, and advised her to lose no time in sending for her friend. At first Leah's proud spirit rebelled at the proposition of a loan from Mrs. Gilbert. The good lady, however, with her

usual kindly tact, succeeded at length in convincing her protégée that her own peace of mind depended upon seeing Miss Moore safely established at Palm Cottage as soon as possible. "For I am so sorry for you in your lonely condition, Miss Mansden, 'stranger in a strange land,' that it really worries me, and I feel as if I had been guilty of an unkindness in tempting you to come so far away from your home in company with strangers."

Leah's eyes filled with tears as she listened to Mrs. Gilbert's self-accusing speech, for she saw through the lady's little ruse, and appreciated the rare delicacy of feeling and kindness of heart that prompted it, and she resolved not to annoy her new-found friend by refusing her kindly offer, or let her pride stand in the way of her own heart's desire.

God only knows how the poor desolate young mother's heart was yearning for a sight of her babe, or with what glad joy she sent the message next day that would soon bring Martha hither with the child.

So in less than three weeks from the time Leah's summons was received by Martha, she and the babe were safely domiciled at Palm Cottage on St. George Street.

Mrs. Gilbert kindly excused Leah from her duties on the afternoon of the day upon which her old friend, Miss Moore, arrived at St. Augustine; and the passionate kisses and tears which Leah lavished upon the babe after they had been driven from the depot, and were safely hidden within the protecting shades of the pretty cottage, made even matter-of-fact Martha weep in sympathy at the touching sight of the young mother's adoring love for her babe.

CHAPTER XII.

AFTER the coming of Martha and the babe, a look of tenderness shone in Leah's eyes which puzzled Mrs. Gilbert almost as much as it pleased her.

"Well, my dear, is your protégée happy now?" Mr. Gilbert asked of his wife, a week or two after Martha's arrival.

"I cannot tell whether she is or not, George," she answered. "Miss Mansden never speaks of her personal affairs, or expresses any pleasure at the near proximity of her old friend. Still, no religious devotee could be more constant in attendance in daily visits to a holy shrine than Miss Mansden is in her visits to Palm Cottage. The moment she is dismissed for the day, she hurries away, and after an hour or two's stay at the cottage returns with a strangely sweet expression on her face, which in some way reminds me of the look on the face of Raphael's Madonna. She is unlike any young girl I ever knew. She is a perfect enigma to me. You know how hard I have persuaded her to join us in the drawing-room of evenings when we have guests, as many of our young society people have expressed a wish to make her acquaintance, but I have never been able to prevail upon her to do so. 'No, dear Mrs. Gilbert,' she always answers, 'I cannot meet them. I do not belong to their

world, and to make the attempt to assimilate with them would be no pleasure to them, and be positive torture to me. So pray forgive me, and do not, I beg, do me the injustice to think that I do not appreciate your kindness of heart, that would put me on equality with your friends.' "

" Still, she is young, handsome, well-bred, well educated, and very intellectual," he said thoughtfully, " and I am sure has been accustomed to the very best society. Perhaps she has met with some great reverse of fortune, and is sensitive about the position she now fills."

" It may be so, but she has never even hinted to me that such is the case," Mrs. Gilbert replied.

The conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Leah, who had come to fill her appointment to read to Mrs. Gilbert. When she discovered the presence of the banker, she apologized gracefully for her intrusion and turned to leave the room. Mrs. Gilbert, however, arrested her departure by saying :

" Mr. Gilbert will do us the honor of being present at our reading this evening, Miss Mansden. He has not yet read my latest work, and we have decided to ask you to read it aloud to him."

" I shall be pleased to do so. Shall I begin at once?" she asked gently,

" If you please," the lady answered.

Leah went to a well-filled bookcase, which stood in Mrs. Gilbert's study, where this conversation occurred, and taking from its shelves a handsomely bound volume, seated herself near the softly shaded light, and began to read.

She was dressed in a gown of soft creamy cashmere, which fitted her beautiful form to perfection.

The only ornament she wore was a bunch of white chrysanthemums fastened at her throat, and her abundant hair, of a rich brown hue, bright with many a golden thread, was dressed high on her shapely head.

As she became interested in her reading, the color came and went in her high-bred face with every new emotion stirred by the sentiments of the author; until Mr. Gilbert, who had been regarding the reader with lazy, half-shut eyes while he listened, thought he had never before seen half so fair a picture.

Still, on the young face he noticed a shade of sadness, or an undefinable something, which seemed so out of place in one of such tender years.

“Could it be,” he asked himself, “that notwithstanding Miss Mansden’s youth and reticence, she was the custodian of a secret concerning her past life, which she would not for worlds have come to the knowledge of the gentle lady who had given her a home and employment, and who was doing all in her power to make her happy and contented?”

The voice of the reader rose and fell with a sweet musical cadence, restful and pleasing to the ear, till the following lines were reached :

“Dear heart, what use in hope—what use,
In waiting long with empty hands held high,
In watching patiently the clouded sky?”

Then the musical voice suddenly grew husky, and the

reader's bosom rose and fell convulsively with suppressed sobs.

Mrs. Gilbert started up in surprise from where she had been half-reclining against the sofa-cushions, and coming quickly to the girl's side, took the book from her trembling hands, saying kindly: "No more reading to night, Miss Mansden. How thoughtless of us to tax you thus! You have been reading for nearly two hours; small wonder that you have broken down."

Leah, pained and mortified at having lost her self-control, dashed her tears hastily aside, saying penitently: "I did not break down from fatigue, believe me, dear Mrs. Gilbert, I did not. It was only from weakly losing my self-control. Will you forgive me?" and she reached her hand to resume the book the lady had taken.

"Yes, but I will not permit you to read longer to-night," she said, smiling down into the dewy eyes of the pleading young face.

"Then I shall be justly punished for not having held my emotions in check," Leah answered. "For I am so deeply interested in the story, that, had I my own way, I should never cease reading till I had finished it."

"You would pay for your folly with a headache and red eyes to-morrow, as many another young person who is addicted to excessive novel reading has done," laughed Mrs. Gilbert, as she crossed the room and placed the book in its place in the bookcase.

"Perhaps the novel-writers will have to bear a share of the blame in this, my dear," said Mr. Gilbert, teasingly.

"They should not make their stories so entrancing, or arouse the reader's curiosity to such a pitch regarding the ultimate fate of the characters."

She laughed back at him as she resumed her seat, and said: "It would be well for all novel-writers were this the only sin in connection with their stories for which they would have to answer. For when one thinks with what avidity novels are read, especially by young people, one can readily realize what an educator a novel-writer may become for either good or evil."

"There is no doubt that many a boy and girl have been led to their ruin by the perusal of trashy and immoral literature," the banker said thoughtfully. And his wife answered:

"Sometimes, when I think of the vast amount of harm that is wrought by those books, I hope the day is not far distant when it will be against the laws of our land to write or publish a book of fiction of any character."

"Oh, do not make such a clean sweep as that," he answered, laughing at her serious face; "only hope that our law-makers may legislate against the writing and publishing of books of a highly sensational and immoral character, the same as they have against obscene literature, and there would soon be an uprooting of this evil, which, while it puts money in the pockets of a few, brings ruin and desolation into the homes of many, who, but for its presence, might have been happy and prosperous. What is your opinion on the subject, Miss Mansden?"

The girl had taken up the white Angora kitten from the hearth-rug as she listened to the conversation between the

husband and wife, and sat passing her hand caressingly over its silky fur.

“ I have never read many novels,” she said modestly, and the soft blue eyes which met those of her interlocutor were still dewy from the few tears she had unwittingly shed while reading Mrs. Gilbert’s book, “ therefore I do not consider myself competent to judge. One thing I will assert, however. I never read a good novel—I mean a work of romance which has morality, honesty, and virtue for its standard—that I do not feel myself strengthened morally and religiously. Mrs. Gilbert’s books are like beautiful sermons to me, exhorting me to a grand, true life ; and the popularity which her books have achieved are proof positive that works of fiction need neither be sensational nor immoral to be widely read by both old and young.”

Mrs. Gilbert smiled her thanks into the earnest young face, while the banker said proudly : “ It would be a moral impossibility for my wife to write anything sensational or immoral. As well might one expect to see a muddy stream emanating from a pure fountain.”

“ There, there ! I must protest against any more compliments,” cried Mrs. Gilbert, laughing, as she rose as a signal for the good-nights to be said ; “ besides,” she added archly, “ don’t you both know that it is very bad form to discuss a book in the presence of its author ? ”

“ We both know that modesty is the true sign of genius,” laughed Mr. Gilbert, as he took himself off to his own den to smoke his evening’s cigar before retiring for the night.

CHAPTER XIII.

"LET us drive by Palm Cottage and take Miss Mansden home," Mrs. Gilbert said to her husband the day following the events related in the preceding chapter, as they were returning from a long delightful drive.

He turned the pretty white ponies into St. George Street, in answer to his wife's request, and they drove slowly along enjoying the bracing air which came stealing up from the blue waters of the bay. The winter sun had just sunk behind a bank of gorgeously tinted clouds, and the sky above them was of a tender primrose hue, which lighted up the grand old trees lining either side of the street, and made a sweet-voiced mocking-bird perched upon a swinging branch burst forth in shrill whistles or tender notes of delight.

Two women were standing at the cottage gate as the carriage drew near. The occupants recognized one as Leah, attired in full walking costume, standing with her back to the street.

She held in her arms a baby, and before the carriage stopped she kissed the child again and again, and then placing it in the arms of her companion, turned to leave the yard. As her hand was on the gate-latch, her eyes fell upon the carriage halted before her, and when she recognized its



“She held in her arms a baby.”—Page 78.

occupants her face became suddenly suffused with a burning blush, which quickly receded, leaving it as white as the petals of an Ascension lily.

“Oh, what a beautiful child,” cried Mrs. Gilbert, whose eyes had wandered past Leah to the laughing infant crowing in the arms of the elder woman. “Won’t you bring it to me a moment, Miss Mansden? Above all things on earth I love a pretty baby.”

“Not better than you love your husband, I hope,” whispered Mr. Gilbert, trying in his comical way to look injured.

“We will discuss that important question later,” his wife returned saucily, as Leah came to the side of the carriage with the child in her arms.

The girl was very pale, and the arms which raised the infant toward the lady trembled visibly.

“Oh, you pretty darling!” Mrs. Gilbert cried, rapturously addressing the child as she clasped it to her bosom.

The baby laughed, crowed, and kicked its tiny feet in the sweetest baby fashion as it caught the lady’s bonnet-strings, and carried them to its mouth.

“Whose child is it, Miss Mansden?” she asked eagerly, as she held the little thing off and looked with admiration into its sparkling violet eyes. “Why, it resembles yourself! Is it a relative of yours?”

Again the scarlet flood overspread Leah’s fair face while with dry lips and a voice trembling despite her efforts at self-control, she answered: “It is an orphan boy whom Miss Moore brought from New York. It was placed in her care till called for by its friends.”

Mr. Gilbert, who had turned his face toward the child, now turned quickly, struck by the agitation in the speaker's voice, and looked steadily into her perturbed face.

Martha noting the little scene from where she stood just inside the gate, now came boldly forward for the purpose of diverting the attention of the lady and gentleman.

Leah's embarrassment was becoming apparent to the whole party except the innocent cause of it, who continued to gurgle and crow as though it were the most pleasing thing imaginable for a babe to be disowned by its own mother.

"This is Miss Moore, I suppose," said Mrs. Gilbert kindly, reaching her hand to shake hands with the pleasant-faced woman.

Martha returned the greeting politely, and Mr. Gilbert raised his hat in answer to his wife's introduction.

As the baby caught sight of the familiar face of its beloved nurse, it reached its tiny arms toward her imploringly, and began to fret uneasily to be transferred to her faithful arms.

"Your beautiful charge has already quite won my heart, Miss Moore," Mrs. Gilbert remarked, as she again kissed the little pleader before transferring him to Martha. "You will bring him to Myrtle Villa to see us, will you not?" the lady continued kindly. "We have no child, and Mr. Gilbert and myself are very fond of children. But we must not keep you standing here with the little one; the evening air grows chilly. Miss Mansden," raising her voice so as to be heard by Leah who had walked to the horses' heads and stood rubbing their pink noses with her white hand, "will you ride home with us? We called expressly for you."

Mr. Gilbert sprang out to assist his wife's companion to her place by the side of Mrs. Gilbert.

Leah bade Martha good-night without once turning her head, or appearing to notice the child, but Mr. Gilbert noticed as he assisted her into the carriage that her hands were cold and trembling.

He was glad, however, that his wife seemingly had not noticed Miss Mansden's agitation when questioned concerning the child.

It might have made her distrustful of the girl, who, he felt assured in his own heart, however appearances might indicate to the contrary, was worthy of trust, although she might be the victim of some unfortunate circumstance which she was trying to conceal from the eyes of the uncharitable world.

The appealing way in which the girl had looked up at him while he was scanning her agitated face had moved his manly heart to the deepest pity for her, and he resolved to let fall no word that would cause his wife to suspect that he harbored the least suspicion against her companion.

"You are very pale, Miss Mansden. Do you feel indisposed?" Mrs. Gilbert asked, as they drove home through the fast deepening twilight.

"I have a headache," Leah replied, looking at the lady with eyes heavy with unshed tears; thus making the poor excuse for her pale face that many a heartsore woman has made before, to hide some secret sorrow that will manifest itself in the countenance of the sufferer, be she ever so brave.

"I am very sorry; perhaps you have worked too hard to-day?"

"I do not think so," the girl answered quickly; "I often have those headaches."

"Well, if your head is not better after tea, we will dispense with our reading this evening, and let you go early to bed."

"You are very kind," she said in an unsteady voice, as the carriage stopped at the villa gates.

The short winter's twilight had deepened into the more dusky shades of night, and when they entered the brilliantly lighted house Leah made her way at once to her own room, and when safely locked therein, tossed her hat and walking jacket from her, and throwing herself face downward upon the bed, gave vent to the tears which she had held in abeyance with a mighty will power, until her head ached miserably.

"Oh, my God, my God! to think that I dare not acknowledge my own child," was the burden of the lament that burst ever and again from the pale lips of the young sufferer.

CHAPTER XIV.

FOR some reason best known to herself, Miss Moore did not accept Mrs. Gilbert's invitation to bring her little charge to visit at Myrtle Villa.

Leah was constant in her visits to Palm Cottage, and, however busy she may have been in the discharge of her duties, or be the day ever so stormy, at least two hours of every twenty-four were spent by her with Martha and the child.

Mrs. Gilbert sent many a gift to the "dear little fellow," as she called him, and she always called to see him when in the vicinity of the cottage.

The resemblance between Leah and the baby increased with the child's growth. If Mrs. Gilbert noticed this growing resemblance she did not remark upon it, or ask any questions concerning the child's parentage. She was too thoroughly a lady of gentle breeding to pry into a subject which was no affair of her own, and one which was evidently avoided by both her secretary and the child's nurse.

The bright winter days slipped past with marvelous rapidity, and gave place to the brighter sunshine of spring, and now May, with its glorious wealth of green, and its myriad buds and flowers, and sweetly perfumed air, was holding high carnival in this fair and favored land.

Eight months of Leah's engagement with the lady who had

proven herself to be a true and steadfast friend to the friendless girl had flown, and the time was rapidly approaching when the recipient of all this kindness would have an opportunity to show her gratitude to her kind friend.

In the seven happy years of Mrs. Gilbert's married life only one disappointment had touched her heart with its heavy finger, and that was, that no sweet frail human blossom had ever come to nestle in her tender bosom, and learn to look upon her with eyes of trusting love, and call her by the holy name of mother. But now the lady's hopes and prayers were about to be fulfilled, and ere long to her heart would come the love that only comes to bless woman after she has gone down into the very "valley of the shadow of death" for the sake of her offspring.

The literary work had been laid aside weeks before, and Leah devoted her whole time to the care of the gentle, uncomplaining invalid.

She read to her, drove with her, wrote her letters for her, and conversed with her on all subjects, dear to the hearts of well-bred, intellectual women, as the two sat taking silken stitches on dainty garments that were always quickly hidden from sight when the banker's bounding footsteps were heard approaching his wife's room.

The bond of sympathy between the two women grew and strengthened with each day, until it became beautiful in its sacredness, and wonderful in its intensity, especially when one remembered, as Mr. Gilbert did, that his wife was Miss Mansden's senior by ten years. Indeed, Miss Mansden was little more than a child in years. Still Mrs. Gilbert, with

seeming unconsciousness of this fact, was beginning to look up to her for sympathy and advice, as an invalid of her class might depend upon a dear and more experienced elder sister, in whose love and wisdom she had the most perfect confidence.

Leah had given up her cherished visits to Palm Cottage, which she was wont to make on each afternoon, and now those visits were postponed till after Mrs. Gilbert had retired for the night. When, having made arrangements with one of the maid-servants of Myrtle Villa to accompany her, she would fly on the wings of love through the darkness to Palm Cottage, to spend one blessed hour in fondling and caressing her child ; yea, and often and often its sweet sleeping face was bedewed by the young mother's bitter tears of repentance, for not having laid her whole past without reserve before Mrs. Gilbert upon the occasion of their first meeting.

"But the lady would have surmised at once that I was a deserted wife, and I, with no evidence to convince her of my blamelessness, should never have known this precious friend," she would muse, and then, giving vent to her feelings of anguish, would burst forth : " Oh ! Herbert, Herbert, is it possible that you have basely deserted me ? No, no, I will not believe it. I know you are dead, my darling, I know you are dead. God forgive me for ever harboring one single thought that aught but death could have parted us ! But what is to become of you, poor child, and your unhappy mother, and how is this all to end ? " and thus while poor Leah was trying with weak human eyes to peer beyond the dark curtain which hides the mysterious future from mortal

ken, the shuttle in the loom of fate was flying quickly to and fro, weaving and shaping her destiny according to the Great Weaver's design.

The rich-hued flowers and fruits of early June were blooming and ripening in all their southern luxuriance, under floods of sparkling sunshine. But all the fragrance they cast upon the gentle breeze, and all the wealth of sunlight of this bright day, were excluded by tightly closed shutters and tightly drawn blinds from one of the lofty apartments at Myrtle Villa. Servants with solemn looks tiptoed through the halls and up and down the stairs, intent upon their various duties, and only speaking in low whispers as they met each other on their rounds.

Mr. Gilbert, with disheveled hair and toilet half made, paced the floor of his library all the long day. Suspense and anxiety were written all over his handsome face, blanching it to a pallor never seen there before.

Leah, white and miserable, wandered aimlessly from room to room, or went out for a breath of fresh air on the extensive grounds, but her anxiety soon drove her back into the house to wait and listen and pray for good news from Mrs. Gilbert's sick-room.

Just as the sun was sinking, and his last rays were sending long arrows of light through the richly stained western windows, and fell in quivering prismatic rays upon the soft velvet carpets, the door of the sick chamber opened, and closed softly but quickly, and "Aunt Caroline," her black face radiant with joy, dashed along the hall as fast as her softly shod feet could carry her. She almost ran over Leah,

who was half-way up the stairs, and who laid hold of the old woman to stop her flight until she could answer her question.

"Oh, Aunt Caroline, how is she? tell me quickly, how is your poor mistress?"

"Oh, Miss Leah, Lawd A'mighty, chile, don't stop me till I's done tole Massa Gauge. He tole me to come quick to de libary de minit I had good news."

"You have good news, then? Oh, Aunt Caroline, you have good news!" she cried in delight, as she released her hold on the old woman's arm.

"Good noos? You's right, honey. I guess Mars Gauge 'll think it's good noos when I tells him dat he's de pa ob de lubliest little gal dis ole nigga eber sot her two eyes on. An' Mis Louise, she's smilin' all ober her sweet face, an' wants Mars Gauge to come quick," and the old nurse disappeared down the hall almost before the last words were out of her mouth.

Leah sat down on the stairs and covered her face with her hands, while she thanked God that her friend's peril had been safely passed.

Mr. Gilbert ran past her, saying joyously: "Wish me joy, Miss Mansden. My wife has presented me with a little daughter."

"I do, with all my heart," she answered feelingly.

The next instant the banker entered his wife's room, followed by the nurse; and Leah, ascending the stairs slowly, sought her own room. She lighted a lamp and sat down and tried to compose herself to read. It was not long, however,

until Aunt Caroline appeared at the door with a message that Miss Leah was to come at once to Mrs. Gilbert's room. The girl obeyed immediately, only stopping long enough to ask the nurse as to her mistress' welfare. The nurse assured her that all was well, and soon Leah was kneeling beside Mrs. Gilbert, who welcomed her with a smile of happiness.

"You must not talk to her," the old physician said brusquely to Leah. "I have just turned Mr. Gilbert out because he would not obey me, and if you talk you will have to share the same fate, because I will not have the patient disturbed."

Leah only smiled into the sick woman's face, and whispered, "God bless you."

"He has blessed me far more than I deserve," the patient whispered back, so as not to be heard by the doctor.

Leah held up her finger warningly, and, after kissing the hand of the newly-made mother, crept softly from the room.

CHAPTER XV.

THE little child which had come to complete the conjugal happiness of Mr. and Mrs. Gilbert grew and throve as only a healthy, well-cared-for child can. She had her mother's large, soft-brown eyes and golden brown hair, with her father's fair complexion and Grecian cast of features.

A more winsome babe never delighted the fond hearts of its idolizing parents and administering friends, and home-life at Myrtle Villa flowed on its peaceful, idealistic way.

The little one had reached her third month, and in a few days was to be presented for baptism. The fond mother, who would intrust the work to no other hands, sat in the morning room of the villa with Leah, where both, with busy fingers, were fashioning a wonderfully rich robe in which the little girl through her sponsor in baptism was to renounce "the pomp and vanity of the world."

"Has the little boy at Palm Cottage been baptized, do you know, Leah?" asked Mrs. Gilbert, as she bent over her own little one's dainty crib and measured the dimpled wrist of the idol of the household, with a bit of creamy old lace.

Leah bent her head lower over the dainty fabric which she was stitching with such wondrous care, and a flush crept

up to her white temples as she answered: "No, I think not; indeed, I am quite sure he has not been baptized."

"Why not ask Miss Moore to have him presented at the time with baby?" the young mother asked, her heart going out in sympathy for the little unknown waif who she thought had never known a mother's love.

So it came about that the next Sunday the two children, to whom fate had dealt out such widely different portions, but whose future destinies she would, with her own strange caprice, blend together as suited her best, were carried side by side through the mellow sunlight of a September morning into the soft sacred shade of St. John's Episcopal Chapel, which for sixty years or more had held out its loving arms to receive the little ones of Christ's flock.

Leah stood godmother for both children; and when the bishop took the laughing, crowing boy into his fatherly arms, and turned to the young godmother for the child's name, Mrs. Gilbert marveled greatly at the strange pallor which overspread her companion's face and blanched her lips as she answered in an unsteady voice, "Herbert," and the baptismal shower fell in sparkling drops upon the white brow of the child of poverty with all the potency for good it held for the idolized daughter of the millionaire—"Ruth," they named the little girl, and well the sweet old name suited the lovely babe.

The family at Myrtle Villa had remained at home all summer and now Mr. Gilbert wished his wife and child with Miss Mansden to accompany him north for a few weeks' change before winter set in. To Leah's secret delight, who

dreaded even a few weeks' separation from her child, Mrs. Gilbert declined to go.

"I am so happy at home, George," she said, "and we are all in such excellent health, that there is no necessity of our going abroad. The season is so far advanced that we shall do very well at home until next spring."

Her husband smiled upon her indulgently as he said: "What a little home body you are, my dear. I suppose I must permit you to have your own way. You must not stay indoors too much though. I shall insist, now that the mornings and evenings are growing cooler, that you ride or drive out twice a day," and he kissed her and left the house.

The morning was delightfully fine. The bay lay still, and unruffled as a polished mirror in the sparkling sunlight, as the carriage from Myrtle Villa, in which were seated Mrs. Gilbert, Leah, and little Ruth in her black nurse's arms, left the villa gates for their usual morning drive.

Mrs. Gilbert, whose heart was always overflowing with cheerfulness, was in even more exuberant spirits than usual. She laughed, chatted, and hummed a sweet love-song as the carriage bowled along the shell-road which lay gray and smooth through the grand forest. Leah struggled hard to keep back the spirit of depression which she felt coming over her own soul. She had, ever since becoming an inmate of Myrtle Villa, with a heroism marvelous in itself, kept the sorrow which overshadowed her life, thrust into the hidden recesses of her heart, and smiled while engaged in lively conversation, though her heart was aching with a burden of woe that would oft-

times find expression through her eyes despite her heroic demination to keep it hidden from all human eyes.

This expression was particularly noticeable this morning, although the poor girl tried her best to enter into something of the exuberance of spirits which was manifested by Mrs. Gilbert.

At length the lady consulted her watch and exclaimed : " Why, it is almost ten o'clock ; we have driven far enough. Speak to the coachman, Leah, please, and tell him to turn the horses homeward." Then, noticing her companion's pale cheeks, added : " I fear you are already tired with the long drive."

" Oh, not in the least, thank you," Leah replied quickly. " I am sure, however, that I have been a dull companion this morning."

" No, indeed, you have not, or at least if you have been dull, I have been too selfish to notice it. I believe, now that I think of it, I have done most of the talking and laughing this morning. I feel so very happy and joyous. Dicey, put the baby in my arms, I want to hold her for a little while."

" She's gittin' pow'ful heavy, Mis' Louise, an' you know, you promised Massa Gawge you wouldn, hold her so much as you did yistady," remonstrated the old nurse.

Mrs. Gilbert laughed. " Give me my baby, Dicey. I was not tired with holding her yesterday ; your ' Massa George ' only imagined I was because you told him that I held the baby nearly all the way home from our drive. You mustn't tell on me this morning." And the happy young mother clasped her child in her arms and covered its sweet mouth with

kisses, and refused to relinquish her precious burden to the nurse until they reached the pillars of the ancient gateway, which still stand as natural monuments of a long-ago past, when their strong walls defended for the king of Spain his garrisoned town in Florida.

Then with a little sigh she permitted Dicey to take the now sleeping child into her own motherly arms. The sigh did not fall unnoticed upon the nurse's, ears and she said with all the privilege of an old black "mammy" of a southern household: "Dar, what I done tole you, Mis' Louise? I knowed you gwine ter make yo' po' arms ache toten dis heaby little lam', but you would do it, an' den 'specs me not to tell Massa Gawge on you."

The young mother had grown strangely quiet in the last half-hour, and Leah noticed with concern that she had also grown slightly pale.

"I fear you have wearied yourself holding the child," she said; "you really should not have done so."

"Oh, no, that did not tire me," Mrs. Gilbert answered as she passed her hand over her forehead, "but I have a slight headache which has come upon me suddenly. Perhaps we drove too far," she said, trying to make light of her sudden depression.

Before they reached the gates of Myrtle Villa, however, an aching languor beset her in every limb, and her face grew white and her lips blue.

Leah, in great alarm, ordered the coachman to drive faster, and then began to rub the lady's cold hands between her own, and express her sympathy in every possible way.

“What could have been the cause of this sudden attack?” she cried, in great distress of mind. “You were feeling so very well before its sudden appearance.”

“My head aches so dreadfully,” moaned the sufferer, and Leah left off chafing the small cold hands, and drew the lady’s head to her bosom, and passed her hand lovingly across the white brow, upon which drops of cold perspiration were standing.

“You’s got a chill, honey, shoah’s you’s bo’n,” said Aunt Dicey sympathetically, and then added reprovingly: “You had betta done what Mars Gawge tole you to, an’ gone to whar de Yankees lib for a little res’ an’ change after all you bin tru dis long hot sum’er, ’sides being sick you’s’e’f. Now you’s gwine ter hab chills, an’ I spec de po’ baby’ll get ’em too, all ’count you not mind’n what Massa Gawge done tole you.”

They had reached the villa gates, and Aunt Dicey stopped short in scolding her “chile” to put her brightly turbaned head out of the carriage door and order the coachman to come quick, “An’ tote Miss Louise in de house, she’s got a chill.”

The man sprung down from his perch with alacrity, and after securing his team to the hitching post, took his young mistress in his strong arms, and carried her tenderly into the house and upstairs to her own room, closely followed by the now thoroughly frightened Leah, and Aunt Dicey with the sleeping babe.

“Now, Josh away, run wid all yo’ might an’ bring Massa Gawge an’ Doctor Cadova. Heed it, sah!” she commanded, as the man opened the door to leave the room.



“The man . . . took his young mistress in his strong arms.”—Page 94.



Leah had tenderly divested the lady of her gloves and bonnet, and was deftly removing the clothing from the shuddering form, when the sufferer gave a smothered scream and pressed her hands to her temples.

“What is it, darling?” the girl cried in anguish, and then: “Oh, dear! oh, dear! oh, Dicey, she is dying! oh, my God, she is dying!” for the beautiful face was convulsed with agony, and the lovely, kindly eyes, the light of which had ever shed happiness upon all around them, were turned wildly upward, while the small hands were clenched in spasmodic tension.

The sound below of a hurried arrival, flying steps upon the stairs, and the next moment the door was flung wide open, and the banker, his face blanched to marble whiteness, had the rigid form of his beloved wife in his arms. In a moment more the physician had arrived, and proceeded at once with professional coolness to make a hurried examination of the patient, but, before his task was finished, his own face had turned almost as pale as the now frantic husband’s.

“Send for Dr. Gray immediately,” was the physician’s hurried orders, as he proceeded to do what he could for the patient’s relief, and Leah hurried from the room to fulfill his command.

Doctor Gray arrived quickly, in answer to the hurried summons of his colleague. There was a hurried examination into the case, a brief consultation between the two physicians, and the terrible verdict contained in one word, and one which has struck terror to the hearts of many a household in the fair southland went forth—“Congestion!”

As this was before telegraphic communication had been established between St. Augustine and the outside world, a messenger on a fleet-footed horse was dispatched to Jacksonville for more physicians, but long before time sufficient for the delivery of the summons had elapsed, the beautiful spirit of Mrs. Gilbert escaped from its prison-house of clay, and stony, inexpressible grief, which was paralyzing in its intensity to Mr. Gilbert and Leah, but found expression in loud lamentations from the colored servants of the household, held full sway at Myrtle Villa. Only one of the inmates of this heretofore happy, peaceful home was unmoved by the storm-cloud of grief which had so suddenly fallen upon the fair scene, leaving devastation and broken hearts in its wake, and that the beautiful infant and only heir of the wealthy family, little Ruth, who lay upon her back in her dainty crib, kicking her tiny feet, gurgling to herself, and crowing with delight, as her little fingers sought to grasp and imprison the sunbeams which, finding a half-closed slat in the window-blind, had crept in as if to amuse the baby-girl, who was this day bereft of a priceless jewel, that all the wealth of the world could not restore—the priceless jewel of a mother's love.



“The beautiful spirit of Mrs. Gilbert escaped from its prison house of clay.”
Page 96.

CHAPTER XVI.

“OH, God, how mysterious art Thy ways !”

The words burst forth passionately from Leah Mansden’s lips as she stood alone with clasped hands and bowed head beside the satin-lined casket, which held all that was mortal of the most beautiful character she had ever known.

“So good, so young, beautiful, honored, and beloved ; with everything in life that heart could wish ; rich in talents, which she used wisely and conscientiously for the good and pleasure of others. Still with so much to live for, with such a vast field for good awaiting the labor of her willing and competent hands, she was, with scarce a moment’s warning, snatched away by the rude hand of death. While I, whose happiness and usefulness, it seems to me, were wrecked on the very threshold of womanhood,—I, whom no one would miss for scarcely a day, am left ! Was this dear friend, this wise counselor, just given to me for a season, so as to rend my heart again with a fresh sense of agony and desolation ; or else, my God ! why, oh, why was I not taken in her stead, and she left to bless the world with her goodness ?”

“What right have we to question the work of the Lord God of Hosts ?”

It was the voice of the gray-haired rector, who had come unobserved into the room, and paused beside the girl in time

to hear her last bitter questions. She looked at him a moment with startled eyes, and then covering her face with her hands, burst into bitter weeping.

“You do not know how good she was, or how deeply I loved her, or you would not have the heart to chide me in this, my great hour of sorrow,” she sobbed.

He laid his hand tenderly upon her trembling shoulder as he answered gently:

“Yes, my child, I know how good she was, and I know how much we all loved her; but by that very love we should be made strong enough to thank God that our treasure was transplanted to the fair gardens of Paradise before the finger of care or sorrow touched her pure heart. For bitter trials come to all who live a goodly length of days, and what reason have we to suppose that, had she lived, she of all others would have been exempt from the common lot of all mankind?”

“You cannot understand my desolation,” she said half bitterly.

“That may be true, my child,” he answered gently, “but attune your ear and listen to a voice which you will hear above the tempest of grief that now assails you. Clear and distinct above the roar and rush of the angry waters which now engulf your soul in gloom, will come the voice of thy God saying: ‘I love thee, I love thee; pass under the rod.’” He removed his hand from her shoulder as he finished speaking, replaced the glass covering over the face of the dead, and looked with pitying eyes on the bowed form of the young girl, as she, smothering down her sobs, crept softly from the presence of death.

CHAPTER XVII.

It was night, and the lights burned dimly at Myrtle Villa.

The hush and gloom of a great unutterable sorrow brooded over the beautiful home. Servants, mechanically performing their various duties, flitted silently about with eyelids swollen from much weeping, for to-day they had seen all that was mortal of their beloved mistress consigned to the peaceful embrace of mother earth.

Leah, her heart almost bursting with its load of grief and desolation, sat in the nursery with the motherless infant clasped in her arms.

She had been attracted to the nursery by the crying of the child. It had always been a good-natured, healthy baby, and she hastened to its side with a mighty fear at her heart that the little thing was ill.

"I don' know what mus' ail de po' little t'ing," Dicey paused in her walking up and down the room, in which, way she had in vain tried to quiet the child, to say in answer to Leah's question. "She ain't sick, an' it seems like the po' little lam' mus' know dat her ma's dun gone nebber to come back no mo'." And Dicey's tears burst forth afresh.

"Let me take her," Leah said gently, and very soon the

fretful child, yielding to the soothing influence of the girl's magnetic touch, slumbered sweetly upon her bosom. Dicey sat down on the floor and leaned her head, the bright turban which she was wont to wear now replaced by a black one, against a chair, and soon her regular breathing told that she too had forgotten her sorrow in the sweet embrace of the angel of sleep.

A low knock at the door aroused Leah from her painful train of thoughts, and in answer to her bidding the door opened and the tall form of the banker appeared in the doorway. There was a look of set, stony grief upon his pale, high-bred features, and his eyes shone with an unnatural luster.

"May I speak to you alone a moment, Miss Mansden?" he said briefly.

"Certainly," she answered.

"Put the child down then, and come with me. I shall not detain you long."

Wondering, she placed the babe tenderly in its crib, and not pausing to arouse the nurse from her slumbers, followed Mr. Gilbert, who led the way to the library. When they had entered he placed a chair for her, and standing before her, said:

"Miss Mansden, I have brought you here to crave a great favor of you."

She looked into his white face with its set lips, and deep grief-lines about the firm mouth, inquiringly, and he continued:

"Will you remain here, for a time, at least, and take

charge of the child, the house, and the servants during my absence?"

Without waiting for her to reply, he hurried on :

"If you choose, you may ask Miss Moore to come with the child from Palm Cottage, and keep you company. Your salary shall be double that which you have received since becoming an inmate of my house. Will you remain?"

The abruptness of the proposition startled, and deprived her of words for a ready reply.

"Am I asking too much of you, Miss Mansden?" he asked gently, at length, as she did not speak.

"Oh, no," she cried with visible emotion. "I am grateful for the confidence you repose in me. But dare I accept such a responsibility? I am young and inexperienced. Would it not be best for you to employ an older and more experienced person?"

"I know of no one to whom I could intrust this charge with the perfect confidence I repose in yourself. Will you accept it?" he asked earnestly.

"Shall you be long absent?" she ventured to ask, before answering his direct question.

"I am unable to state the length of my absence," he replied. "I have given no thought to it. I only know that go I must, and go at once. I am more than half mad now, and to remain here twenty-four hours longer would be to risk becoming a raving maniac. You, Miss Mansden, who, of all the world, can nearest approach an appreciation of my loss, will not marvel at my despair."

She answered him only by her tears, and he continued :

"If ever I regain fortitude sufficient to face the scenes of my lost happiness, I shall return. If not, I will die a wanderer in a foreign land. I shall begin my journeying at twelve o'clock to-night, and already the clock has sounded the eleventh hour. Speak quickly—will you accede to my request?"

The girl noted now what she had failed to notice before—that his suit of broadcloth had been replaced by a dark gray traveling suit, and his overcoat and gloves lay on a chair near by that in which she sat.

"I will accept the trust," she said, as a great sob swelled in her throat and checked further utterance.

"Thank you," he answered briefly, and drawing a pocket-book from the inside pocket of his coat, took out a card and presented it to his companion, saying: "When you want money, all that is necessary for you to do will be to present this card to the cashier of Gilbert's private banking-house, and your order will be honored for any amount; and if you should, at any time, wish my address, it may always be obtained at the same place. Now I am ready to depart."

He turned away, and, hastily possessing himself of his overcoat and gloves, took up his hat, with its heavy band of crape, from the library table. With his left arm and hand thus burdened, he held out his right to bid her farewell. She had risen to her feet, and, as she mechanically placed her hand in his, said in tones of entreaty:

"Do not go without taking leave of your little girl."

He instantly dropped her hand, and said, in a husky voice, as he turned abruptly away:

"You know not what you ask; I could not bear it. God knows that I *could not*."

With tears streaming down her face, Leah watched him leave the room, and, standing in the library door, saw him traverse the length of the wide hall, and disappear through the outside door into the darkness and hush of midnight. Then going back to the silent nursery, the girl sat down beside the crib where the innocent child slumbered, all unconscious of the awful change which the last few days had wrought in the once happy home of her heart-broken sire.

Where the unhappy man went, or how he managed to battle successfully against the great waves of despair that threatened to engulf his reason in ruin, when, man-like, he had turned and fled from the once bright scene where the first sorrow of his life had overtaken him, and from the little child who looked up at him with eyes so resembling those of her dead mother, God only knows. The man himself, in after years, could never tell. He became a wanderer in foreign lands, and the bright-hued flowers of two summers had blossomed and dropped their sweet petals on the well-kept grave of his beloved wife, before reason fully resumed its sway, and he turned his half-reluctant face toward his native land.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A STORM had been raging over the city all day. The wind hurled great cloud masses across the heavens, dipping down in sudden squalls and furious eddies, lashing the waters of the bay into whirling spots of foam, or chasing the huge waves like drifted snow, to the opposite shore.

Leah sat in the nursery at Myrtle Villa, while her busy fingers fashioned a child's garment.

At her feet played two beautiful children, a boy of three years and a girl one year his junior.

Often she paused in her work to gaze at the pretty picture made by the flaxen-haired, blue-eyed boy, and his brown-eyed, sunny-haired companion—her own child and that of the dead woman she had loved so fondly.

It was something over two years since Mr. Gilbert, grief-laden, had fled from this, the scene of his sorrow, leaving his young child and elegant home to Leah's care.

Most loyally had the girl fulfilled her duties, proving that the confidence the banker imposed in her on the memorable night of his departure had not been misplaced.

During all those months no correspondence between the master of the house and herself had been attempted. She knew nothing of his whereabouts, nor had she the least idea as to the date of his return home.

Leah laid aside her work at last, and lifted the little girl, who was beginning to show signs of weariness, to her lap.

Just then a timid, half-hesitating knock fell upon the closed door, and Dicey, who had been busying herself in the room, stepped to open it. Her ample form almost hid that of the intruder from Leah's sight, but the old woman's scream of delight, and her glad exclamation: "Bress de Lawd, Massa Gawge done come home!" brought her instantly to her feet, and with the child still clasped in her arms, she stood face to face with the returned wanderer.

His complexion was deeply bronzed, and he had aged perceptibly since she last saw him, although his face had regained the kindly expression which habitually shone through its calm dignity.

The little girl in Leah's arms looked at the intruder with brown eyes, wide open in childish curiosity. Before the young lady had recovered her self-possession sufficiently to speak, Mr. Gilbert stepped quickly into the room.

Snatching the astonished child into his own arms, he pressed her fondly to his heart, and while covering her face with tears and kisses, murmured, "My lost darling's child."

It was not surprising that Mr. Gilbert recognized his child at a glance, for, even had his parental instinct been at fault, the remarkable resemblance between the little girl and her dead mother would have served to direct him rightly.

The child, finding herself thus summarily taken possession of by an entire stranger, and a man at that, was badly frightened. She struggled to free herself from the passionate grasp which held her so fondly, and reached her tiny arms

towards Miss Mansden, crying pitifully : "Take me, Miss 'eah, take me quick ! Me don't 'ove dis big man ;" and then as her friend did not answer, but stood overcome by emotion, shading her eyes with her hand, the little one appealed to her faithful nurse. "Oh, Mammy, Mammy, take me, me hates dis man, make him doe away, me hates him." Then noticing the tears streaming down Dicey's cheeks, the child too began to cry ; softly at first, but as the unwelcome caresses continued to be showered upon her, she grew violent, screamed and kicked, and slapped her father in the face with her tiny hand.

Leah came to the rescue of the little one at length, and as she took her again into her own arms, said gently : "You must excuse your little daughter's conduct, Mr. Gilbert ; remember she has never known her father. Have patience, she will soon learn to love you."

"Me 'on't 'ove him," cried the indignant baby. "He makes Miss 'eah c'ye an' he makes my Mammy c'ye. Doe away, big man," and she motioned him away with her tiny hand. Then noticing that tears were also streaming from the "big man's," eyes her tender heart melted towards him : "Don't c'ye ; me 'll 'ove 'ou a 'ittle bit if 'ou 'on't take me f'om Miss 'Eah."

This quaint attempt at consolation on the child's part brought smiles to the tear-stained faces around her.

By and by, when they had all grown calmer, the father so won the heart of the child that she was induced to sit upon his knee, and take his diamond-encrusted watch, which he had held out as a bribe to her attentions, into her hands for inspection.

Little Herbert, who had remained a silent though amazed spectator of the whole scene, now went up shyly to the banker's side, and laying one hand in the girl's lap, looked with admiring eyes at the shining trinket she was turning from side to side in her tiny hands.

"This is Miss Moore's little charge, I suppose," said Mr. Gilbert, resting his hand a moment on the child's curly head. "What is your name, little man?"

"Herbie Waymond," lisped the boy, looking fearlessly into the kindly eyes bent upon him.

"Oh, ho! I thought it was the same. He has grown to be a fine, handsome fellow;" and Mr. Gilbert's eyes, as he spoke, left the boy's face and wandered to that of Miss Mansden, which, for some unaccountable reason, had been suddenly overspread by a vivid blush.

"He is a very good child and we all love him dearly," she said in a low voice, mentally praying the while that Mr. Gilbert had not noticed her confusion. He had not only noticed, and wondered at it, but now, as he looked from the boy's face to that of the young lady, he marveled at the resemblance between the two.

"He resembles you enough to be your little brother, Miss Mansden," he said, as if speaking his thoughts aloud.

"Do you think so? Others have remarked upon the resemblance," she answered calmly, and trying to quiet the loud throbbing of her heart.

The banker regarded her face a moment with a puzzled expression, then the conversation drifted to other topics.

Leah tried to give him an account of her stewardship for

the last two years, and brought her accounts for his inspection, which he only honored with a brief glance.

She told him many an anecdote of his child's life, her memory always aided in these reminiscences by the proud Dicey, who sat on the floor beside her beloved master's feet, and listened while she "minded de chil'un," who, now that peace was restored, had returned to the play in which they had been interrupted by the banker's sudden appearance.

The sun set behind a bank of gorgeously tinted clouds, and the tender twilight came stealing into the nursery, where Mr. Gilbert still lingered, as if loath to take his eyes away from the little fairy who paused occasionally in her play to glance from beneath her long black lashes at her "stranger father" whose presence in the nursery was such a mystery to her.

Soon the tea-bell sounded through the quiet house, and Leah said :

"Well, Mr. Gilbert, my mission in your house is ended ; but before I go permit me to tender my poor thanks for the unprecedented kindness which has been showered upon me ever since my first coming to Myrtle Villa. Words can never express the gratitude I owe you nor the depth of love and reverence with which your dear wife's image will ever be enshrined in my memory."

Her rising emotion checked her further speech, and stooping, she lifted the little girl to her lap, and leaning her brow against the brown rings of soft hair adorning the child's head, burst into tears at the sudden thought of having so soon to part from the child she loved so well.

Mr. Gilbert took a few hurried turns across the floor in silence, and then, pausing before the girl and his child, said :

“ Miss Mansden, you say your mission in my house is ended ; on the contrary, it seems to me it has just begun, for how can the child do without your loving care and wise training, now that she is fast outgrowing her days of infancy ? Then she did well enough in Dicey’s faithful care : now she needs another kind of care as well. Who so capable of bestowing this upon her as yourself,—you, who are so faithful in the discharge of every duty, and who love the child for her dead mother’s sake ? ”

She raised her face from the child’s hair, and looked at him through her tears questioningly.

“ You must not leave the child,” he said briefly, in answer to the look.

“ I *must*,” she replied firmly. “ Do you not realize that your home-coming has made it impossible for me to remain longer under your roof ? ”

“ Would to God,” he said bitterly, “ that I had remained abroad longer, if my coming is to deprive my child of the motherly care you have bestowed upon her. Why not remain ? ” he added imploringly. “ Miss Moore is here, and I shall only stay at home a few days.”

“ I am surprised that you, who know society so well, should ask me why I cannot remain,” she said coldly, as she put the little girl down and rose to her feet.

“ Yes, I do know society, and curse it, too, for the spirit of uncharitableness which pervades it to such an extent, that it is ever ready to ascribe evil motives to the most meritori-

ous and innocent actions. I thought, however, that if Miss Moore would remain here with you, malicious tongues might be kept silent."

Leah shook her head and said: "Miss Moore is not here. I could never induce her to give up Palm Cottage for a residence at the villa, although she often sends Herbert, as to-day, for company for Ruth. Were she to remain here, however, I could not stay under the circumstances, much as it grieves me to part with the little girl."

Before the banker had time to answer, Dicey, who had paused to listen as she was shaking up the snowy pillows into fluffy lightness which belonged to the dainty crib of the child, said: "What's dat you's talkin' 'bout, Mis Leah, honey? Is you studin' 'bout lebin' me wid nobody to tell me what to do but dem fool niggahs dat don't know half as much as I does, an' a po' baby dat ain't got no ma, nor nobody to take keer of her 'cep' me and her pa. Mis Leah, I hopes my ole heahin' has done 'cebe me dis time for sho'."

"No, Dicey, you heard rightly. I must go at once. You may bring Ruth to Palm Cottage every day to see me, if her father is willing, and I will do all I can to help you until another housekeeper comes to the villa."

"Well, the Lawd help dis po' old niggah now!" was Dicey's pious ejaculation as she resumed her labor of love with a solemn face.

Leah stooped and lifted the little boy from where he was sitting on the carpet at her feet, and, standing him in a chair, proceeded to put on his cloak and cap, preparatory to going home.

The banker's child, noting the action, ran and clung to Leah's skirts, and begged her to "let Ruth go, too."

Mr. Gilbert took the little girl in his arms, and tried to hush her entreaties.

"Ruth must stay with papa and Dicey," he said, "and to-morrow we will go and see Miss Leah and Herbie." But the spoiled little beauty kicked, struggled, and screamed until her father was glad to let Dicey take her off his hands and amuse her in some remote part of the house until Miss Leah and the little boy were out of her reach.

"Where are you going, Miss Mansden, if I may ask?" he said, as the door closed on the retreating forms of the nurse and screaming child.

"To Palm Cottage," she answered briefly. "Miss Moore still resides there and her home is mine."

He smothered down a sigh, and unclosed his lips as if to say something, which words he quickly repressed and said instead: "At least you will allow me to order the carriage for you?"

"Oh, no, indeed, thank you," she said quickly, and smiling as she lifted her eyes to his from where her fingers had been busy tying the ribbons of the boy's cap. "It is only a short distance, you know, and Herbert often walks it."

She placed the child on the floor as she spoke, and picking up her own sailor-hat from the bed, placed it gracefully upon her well-poised head, and flung a scarf around her shoulders.

"Come, Herbie," she said, and taking the child's right

hand in her left, she held her disengaged one towards the banker, who stood looking at her with the shadow of a great disappointment in his eyes.

“Good-bye, Mr. Gilbert,” she said simply, and then suddenly asked entreatingly: “You will allow Aunt Dicey to bring little Ruth to see me often, will you not?”

“She must or the child will pine herself to death,” he said gloomily.

He opened the door for them to pass out, listened to them going slowly down the stairs, and soon heard the massive hall door open and close upon them.

Then turning quickly he seized his hat, left his lonely home, and took up his quarters for the night at the nearest hotel.

While Leah, with all her heart-strings quivering with pain, accommodating her footsteps to the faltering ones of the little child, plodded along her spiritless way through the wet evening and dreary streets, with the street lamps shining in the pools of muddy water, to Palm Cottage.

It was all over. Her friend and wise counselor was dead; her occupation gone, and the doors of the palatial home by stern necessity closed against her forever. Unknown, homeless, and friendless, save for the faithful friendship of Martha and that of the banker, whose friendship she did not now even dare claim, what wonder that her life-hues at this moment were somewhat the color of the dull gray autumn skies above her, or the black waters of the bay that moaned and sobbed at her feet?

CHAPTER XIX.

“You need not give me an answer now. Take time to reflect upon it. I have startled you, perhaps, by my abruptness.”

The scene is in the plainly furnished parlor at Palm Cottage ; the speaker, a tall, handsome man nearing the meridian of life ; the person addressed, a young woman whose age does not yet number twenty years, and who sits helpless and faint, with a deathly pale face and startled eyes, before her visitor. It will only take a brief glance of the reader who has followed the thread of this story to recognize the two as Mr. Gilbert, the private banker of St. Augustine, and Leah Mansden, the secretary and companion of his late wife. The time was three months after Mr. Gilbert's sudden arrival at Myrtle Villa.

During these months he had become a frequent caller at Palm Cottage, and society, that permits nothing to pass unnoticed before its uncharitable eyes, had already begun to shrug its shoulders, and throw out broad hints about the frailty of woman, while what should have been condemned as the dishonor of man was smiled at and condoned as the most natural thing in the world, and in nowise deserving condemnation. That the wealthy George Gilbert would con-

descend to choose for himself a wife from among the poor and lowly, and one who was unknown in society's charmed circles, except as a young person wholly dependent upon her own exertions, never occurred to the minds of the haughty dames and simpering misses, whose doors were always open and themselves ready to receive with their brightest smiles the "naughty" but fortunate man whose wealth covered up all his faults and shortcomings.

To Leah's credit be it recorded, that the thought of becoming the second Mrs. Gilbert had never once entered her mind. The banker's frequent calls were always made ostensibly to consult her in regard to the well-being of the little Ruth, or to ask her advice concerning some hitch which had occurred in the domestic machinery at the villa, which had proved to be too knotty a problem for his masculine mind to solve. She had advertised for another situation; and having received an advantageous offer from a wealthy family of Jacksonville to become the governess for three small girls, she had decided to accept it, and Miss Moore and the little boy were to remove with herself to the latter city with the beginning of the New Year, which was now only two weeks distant.

It had been upon the occasion of her first unfolding her plans to Mr. Gilbert, when he had dropped in early one morning to inquire if the little boy might spend the day at the villa, as companion for the lovely little daughter of the house, that he had surprised her by an offer of marriage.

He had made no violent declaration of his love for her; had he done so, I am sure Leah would have refused him on

the spot. He had simply said that his life was incomplete without her loving presence.

“I can never love another woman with the idolizing affection I bestowed upon my first wife. Such love as that only comes once into the life of any man. But, Miss Mansden, if you can be content with reverence and fidelity on my part, and such love as I have to give, and become my wife, and the mother of my child, I pledge myself with all the honor of my manhood that your happiness shall ever be paramount in my life, over every other consideration.”

The suddenness of the proposition, and the thoughts of how she had deceived him in regard to her own past before making his acquaintance, the consequence of which now stood so menacingly before her, almost deprived her of consciousness. Then he, pitying her evident agitation, had said kindly, as he took her cold hand between his own firm warm palms :

“You need not give me an answer now. Take time to reflect upon it. I have startled you, perhaps, by my abruptness.”

She answered him never a word, and he laid her hand gently down, and turning away quickly, left her to herself and her own conflicting emotions.

By and by Martha found her still sitting where he had left her, with the old look of anguish on her colorless face, which she had not seen there since the girl's first great sorrow had spread its dark brooding wings over her young life.

To the woman's anxious questions as to the cause of her evident distress, Leah answered, with pale, dry lips :

“Mr. Gilbert has asked me to become his wife.”

“Is it possible! What answer did you give him?” were Martha’s exclamation and hurried question, as soon as she had recovered from her surprise as to be able to speak.

“I have given him none as yet,” the girl answered listlessly.

“Do you love Mr. Gilbert, Leah?” was the next question.

“Yes, I love him, but not as I loved my baby’s father,” she answered in a low tremulous voice.

“Then why should you hesitate to accept the honored position he offers you?” Martha further inquired.

“And you, Martha—you, who know all my bitter past, dare to ask me why I should not become the wife of this honorable man, whom I have deceived ever since I first knew him! Would you have me complete my work, and repay him for his generosity and goodness by perpetrating the greatest wrong a woman could commit against the man she weds?” she said bitterly.

“Oh, no, no; infinitely no! You ought to know me better than to suppose for a moment that I would advise you to do so wicked a thing,” returned Martha, hurt beyond expression at the girl’s insinuation. “Mr. Gilbert has asked you to become his wife; I suppose you have given him no answer? When he comes to hear your decision, lay your whole life before him without reserve. Tell him the motive which first led you to keep your early marriage, and the birth of your child a secret from Mrs. Gilbert when entering her service, and then let the decision rest with him, whether you become his wife or not.”

"Martha, you know not what you are asking me to do. Bid me walk through a fiery furnace or stand in front of a belching cannon, and believe that I would have more courage to face the physical pain and death that would inevitably ensue, than I would have to unveil my bitter past before Mr. Gilbert's eyes," the girl replied hopelessly.

"Then trust me to tell him for you," the elder woman pleaded.

"Never, never!" Leah answered firmly. "I would rather die than that Mr. Gilbert should know of my deceit."

"Then, Leah, for God's sake, for Mr. Gilbert's sake, and for the sake of yourself and child, do not marry this man," Martha implored with great earnestness.

Leah made no reply to the pathetic appeal, but getting up from where the banker had left her sitting, dragged her heavy footsteps out of the room, and Martha heard her ascending the stairs with a slow, listless tread, as though all hope and happiness were crushed out of her young life forever.

CHAPTER XX.

ALL that miserable day Leah, in the locked seclusion of her own room, battled with the awful temptation that assailed her peace, and held out glowing pictures of happiness which were in store for her, did she but hearken to the voice of the tempter, which must have been an unhappy spirit returned to earth from some unknown realm, "seeking whom he might devour."

"Should she heed Martha's advice?" She asked her heart over and over again.

"Do so, and see your suitor turn from you with disgust and scorn too deep for utterance," replied the voice of the tempter.

"Then I shall simply tell him that it is impossible for me to become his wife, and give him no reason for my refusal."

"And take your place with the hard-handed children of toil. Go back to poverty and privation, and see your son grow to manhood amid environments which will be a barrier to his education and future usefulness," whispered the wily tempter.

All the long hours of that, to her, never-to-be-forgotten night, when no white-robed angel of sleep came to soothe her into even a brief forgetfulness of the maddening question as

to which course she should pursue, she tossed upon her restless couch, bathing her hot pillow with tears, and the first beams of the winter sun, streaming in through her uncovered window-panes, found her as undecided as she had been when her tormenting vigils began.

Martha came to her door a little later with a cup of delicious coffee she herself knew so well how to prepare, and begged the girl for admittance. When the door was opened at length, the woman looked with pitying eyes on the pale, haggard, young face, which told more plainly than words could express of the anguish of mind its owner was passing through. She sat down on the side of the bed and smoothed back the thick hair from Leah's hot brow, and pressed her to drink the beverage she had brought.

Martha did not refer, however, to the topic which had been the subject of their conversation the morning before. She was not a woman given to nagging or harassing others with her opinions or importunities. When occasion required she spoke her mind frankly, and gave her sound, practical advice freely, and then there was an end of it, as far as she herself was concerned. She had discharged what she considered to be her duty, and quickly washed her hands, so to speak, of the whole matter.

After Leah had drunk the coffee she felt much refreshed, and Martha left her again to herself and her torturing thoughts. She rose and took her morning bath and made a careful toilet. Just as it was completed she heard the sharp click of the front gate latch, and looking out at the window, saw the

handsome, erect form of the banker walking up to the front door, with his usual graceful, proud carriage.

Her heart gave a mighty bound, and the blood rushed to her brain in a blinding wave. She pressed her hand tightly to her loudly beating heart, and descended the stairs in time to open the door in answer to his ring. Little Herbert was playing in the hall as she passed, and laid hold of her skirts with his chubby hands, and held up his rosy lips for a morning kiss. She stooped and lifted the child in her arms and pressed him for a moment to her aching heart. Then, kissing the little upturned face again and again, she put the child down and hurried on her way, just as the second impatient ring echoed through the house. In a moment more she was leading the way before Mr. Gilbert to the parlor.

The expression of his face was not one that would indicate he was wholly devoid of hope of a favorable answer to the momentous question which he had left in Miss Mansden's hands to decide.

After they had reached the shaded seclusion of the parlor, he took both her hands within his own, and said tenderly : "I am here for my answer, Miss Mansden. Leah, dear Leah, you will bid me hope ?"

It was the first time she had ever heard her baptismal name pass his lips, and the sound sent an unaccountable thrill through every fiber of her being. She hung her head, her face was suffused with blushes, and the hands he held so tenderly, yet firmly, trembled in his grasp. He dropped her right hand, and putting the fingers of his own beneath her fair chin, tried to raise her face toward him, as he said :

“Look into my eyes, little one, and tell me you are not going to send me from the light of your presence with the weight of a crushing disappointment upon my heart.”

“But there is something I must tell you before I promise to become your wife,” she faltered, and the violet eyes she lifted pitifully to those of her suitor were brimming with tears,—“a confession, a——” Her tears burst forth like a sudden April shower, and sobs choked her further utterance.

Mr. Gilbert drew her head to his breast and encircled her trembling form with his strong arms.

“A confession, little one? Well, what is it? Are you going to tell me that some one else has possession of the heart I covet?”

“Oh, no, no,” she sobbed, with her face hidden near his heart, the violent throbbing of which fell audibly upon her hearing.

“And you do not love another?” He bent his face lower over the head with its wealth of sunny hair resting upon his bosom, as he asked the eager question and waited her reply.

“I do not love another,” came the muffled answer.

“And you do love me, little one? Love me sincerely and fondly, despite the disparity in our ages; and you will soon give me the proud privilege to call you by the sacred name of wife?”

The reply made to this tender appeal was very broken, and part of it inaudible even to his keen sense of hearing. But what he heard satisfied him, for he held her in his arms and kissed her tears away, and said soothingly:

“My darling, this is all I want to know. You love me

and will be my wife, and I have the proud satisfaction of knowing that I have won a priceless jewel, a noble, tender, and heroic woman ; one who held her head erect through all the frowns bestowed upon her by the fickle god, Fortune ; and one who, though unprotected and alone, was strong enough to battle with adverse circumstances bravely, and keep herself pure and unspotted from the world. My darling, I ask no greater boon on earth than the love of such a one as you have proved yourself to be."

With a little sigh of content she nestled in his arms and gave herself up to the intoxication of his caresses and words of praise, not unlike a poor storm-tossed bird, weary of breasting the tempest, and willing at last to rest passively in the hands of its captor, and for the time forget what the consequences of its captivity might be. The last golden opportunity for the confession which had hung tremblingly upon her lips was lost, and lay, like a delicate vase, shattered by one rude blow, the many broken pieces of which no mortal hand could ever cement into even a semblance of its former beauty.

Before the lovers parted, which was an hour later, an early day was fixed for their nuptials, when the doors of Myrtle Villa would be flung wide open to receive its new mistress.

After Mr. Gilbert had finally taken a tender leave of his affianced bride, she, not daring to meet the questioning eyes of Martha, started at once to escape to her room. Again she came upon the baby boy, who had loaded his toy cart with blocks and started on a journey with them to the oppo-

site end of the hall. He called out to Leah as she came in sight: "Sis'er"—the name he always called her—"tome an' see my 'oad of 'ood. Me is doin' to take it to ve kitchen for Aunt Dinah to took wiv."

She paused and looked down into the innocent face a moment, with eyes whose tender lovelight of a few moments before was quenched in an irrepressible world of anguish. Then quickly snatching up the astonished child, she ran upstairs with him, and going into her own room, locked the door after her and laid him on the bed. She sank on her knees before him, and gave way to such a storm of tempestuous weeping that the very angels in heaven must have pitied her, despite the one great fault that marred the beauty of her character.

"Oh, my baby, my baby! my own flesh and blood! How you would loathe and despise the being who gave you birth were you old enough to understand what a cowardly wretch that mother is! Oh, darling, turn away your innocent, frightened eyes from my face before I go raving mad! Oh, my God, my God, what have I done! Herbert, Herbert, from your home in heaven, how you must despise me now!"

"Oh, sis'er, sis'er!" wailed the little boy upon the bed, who had, up to this time, been too frightened and astonished to utter a word, "what is ve matter? Don't c'y—oh, don't c'y. Hebie 'oves 'ou, an' he 'ill be dood. Oh, sis'er, sis'er, p'ease don't c'y;" and in a moment the baby's arms were wound tightly around the kneeling woman's neck, and the little one's sobs and tears mingled with her own.

A quick, energetic step in the hall, and Martha's voice

sounded through the closed door : " Leah, are you here, and is the baby with you ? I cannot find him any place."

" Yes, me's heah, Aunt Martie. P'ease tome in, my poor sis'er's c'ying so loud," bleated out the sharp baby voice to the listener's ears. A hand was laid on the door-knob, but the door was tightly locked.

" Open the door, Leah," Martha demanded, and without a word the young mother obeyed, and Martha, with a world of reproach in her affectionate eyes, stood before her. She had seen Mr. Gilbert as he was leaving the house, and by his springing step and happy face knew that he had gained the day.

" Oh, Martha," Leah burst forth passionately, " I have promised to become Mr. Gilbert's wife, and—cowardly wretch that I am !—my secret is still hidden from him."

" Is there no appeal from your decision ? Is it too late to undo what you have done ?" the woman asked eagerly.

" Oh, yes, it is too late, too late ! I must either fulfill my promise just as I am, or fill a suicide's grave, for I could never, never now endure the shame of a confession. I will kill myself first !"

" Hush, Leah, hush !" Martha commanded sternly. " You have chosen your own path, now walk in it like a brave woman, without weakly looking back or shedding useless tears. Give me the child, and his welfare shall be the study of my life." She took the boy in her strong arms as she spoke, and wiped his tears away.

" Oh, do not reproach me, for God's sake," cried the distressed young mother.

"No, I shall not reproach you ; your own conscience will do that," the woman answered sternly. "Of course you will give the child to me," she continued. "I will try to be both father and mother to him."

"He has always been your child, dear Martha," Leah answered gently, "and shall continue to be. But now I shall be able to defray all his expenses, and give you and the boy a beautiful home of your own. The child, if he lives, shall have all the advantages of education that wealth can procure."

"And what shall I tell him, Leah, when he has grown to years of understanding and asks me for a history of his parents and ancestors?" Martha asked grimly.

Leah burst into tears again. "Oh, Martha," she cried, "you, who know something of my suffering, should forbear to torture me so. God knows I am trying to do what seems to me to be the best for us all."

"God grant that your own unhappiness may not be sealed instead, my poor misguided child," Martha replied, as she put the boy down, and drawing Leah's head to her bosom, kissed the quivering, troubled lips. The girl raised her hand to pat the cheek of her only true and tried friend, and the brilliant diamond in the engagement ring which the banker had that morning placed upon her white finger, sparkled and glowed like a living flame in the bright morning sunbeams.

CHAPTER XXI.

“MARRIED, in this city, at ten o’clock A.M., November 27, at St. John’s Episcopal Church, by Rev. Thomas Loudon, Hon. George G. Gilbert, to Miss Leah Mansden, all of this city. No cards.”

This simple announcement, appearing in the “St. Augustine News,” a week after the incidents transpired related in the preceding chapter, fell with startling effect upon the *bon ton* of the ancient city.

These society devotees read the announcement over and over again, as though they could scarcely believe their eyes, and then some one exclaimed :

“Who ever heard of such a *mésalliance*? Has George Gilbert lost his senses?”

“It was all the girl’s fault. She is an artful minx, and no doubt has used her deceitful wiles to entrap the banker into a marriage with herself ever since the death of his first wife. What fools men are! Were they ever known to see through a woman’s deceit?” chimed in a second voice.

“Especially when the woman happens to be young and beautiful like Miss Mansden,” laughed a male voice.

“She may be young, but she certainly is not beautiful,” retorted the first speaker, bristling with resentment, at the

compliment paid to the personal appearance of the poor girl who had carried off the prize in the matrimonial market.

“Besides, who was she? A Miss Nobody, hailing from Nowhere, with neither home nor relative as far as we know.”

“Tut, tut, girls, don’t be so uncharitable. I am sure that the young lady has deported herself well since she came to this city,” said an old gentleman reprovingly.

“Well, Mr. Gilbert’s pride must have taken a mighty fall when he chose his late wife’s salaried companion for his wife, and mother to his little daughter.”

“*A propos*, speaking of his child, how long has her mother been dead?” inquired an old lady in the group.

“Two years and three months,” some one answered.

“Do you remember how distressed you all were about the poor man’s grief at the time, and feared that he would soon die of a broken heart, or go crazy, or commit suicide, or something of the sort? Oh, my dears, I was not in the least alarmed about him. I am an old lady, and have seen much of the world, and have never known it to fail: the more heartbroken the widower at the death of his wife, the sooner will he console himself with another;” and the old lady laughed softly and beamed on the bevy of young people around her, over her gold-rimmed eye-glasses.

“Mr. Gilbert might at least have chosen his wife’s successor from his own set, and not stooped down to pick up a nobody,” pouted a rosy-cheeked damsel. “I wonder who is going to call on her? Not I, for one.”

“Nor I,” “Nor I,” “Nor I,” chorused the others.

It is the way of the world, dear reader, you know, so why

should we waste our valuable time in listening to the indignation expressed by those society leaders, because one of "their set" had so far forgotten his duty to society as to marry a poor and unknown person?

It mattered not however richly endowed this person may have been with attributes that go to make a noble woman. She was poor and unknown, and that was enough to brand her as unworthy to enter with the *élite*.

Therefore we will leave these ladies and gentlemen (?) to express their indignation and contempt to their hearts' content, while we follow the fortunes of Mr. Gilbert and his young bride, who knew and cared nothing about "the tempest in a teapot" their sudden marriage had caused among the banker's aristocratic friends.

The wedding had been a strictly private one, only a half-dozen of Mr. Gilbert's most intimate friends being invited to witness the ceremony, or knew anything about the affair. The bridal party had left the city immediately after the wedding ceremony for Cuba, on a short wedding journey. In five weeks they returned, and the broken threads of domestic happiness at Myrtle Villa were gathered up, and Leah was installed as mistress in the palatial home where once she had occupied a very different position.

The study of the late Mrs. Gilbert was allowed to remain undisturbed, just as the gentle lady had left it, when she laid down her life-work to obey the summons that comes early or late to all God's children. To this room, kept sacred to the memory of one dearly beloved, both husband and wife came often, with feelings akin to those that fill a Roman

Catholic's heart when kneeling before a holy shrine. The young Mrs. Gilbert was a person of marked refinement of character, coupled with a wealth of good sense and tact. She made no attempt to gain recognition from the gay butterfly world which her husband had insulted by a marriage with herself. She made no vulgar display of wealth—a mistake made by many a one suddenly elevated from a humble to a wealthy position; and with her quiet, unassuming, but gently dignified manner, she pursued the quiet tenor of her way, undisturbed by the cold politeness or supercilious glances of her aristocratic neighbors. By and by when the fact began to dawn upon the would-be-very-select set, that their good-will was a matter of small moment to either the banker or his fair wife, with human perversity it began to make overtures for their friendship, and calls and invitations began to pour in upon them. This concession on society's part was met with the same gentle dignity by Mrs. Gilbert, that its former disposition to ignore her had been. Consequently it became the fashion to cultivate the friendship of the banker's young wife, and ere long she became the leader in the very set which had once tried to look upon her with cold disdain. This position, although wholly unsought, was greatly enjoyed by Leah, who now was tasting for the first time the sweets of fashionable life.

Myrtle Villa became the scene of many a fashionable gathering, the like of which it never knew during the first Mrs. Gilbert's lifetime. For while all her neighbors, both rich and poor, had known and loved this charming lady, who was always foremost in all charitable movements, and with a wealth of

sympathy for all earth's sorrowing children, her tastes and literary work had led her to prefer the quiet seclusion of her own home to the fashionable rounds of gay society. Hence, society had accepted the decree good-naturedly enough, consoling itself the while with the charming productions emanating from the talented lady's industrious pen, while the author was left undisturbed to enjoy her home and family, or revel in a world of her own creation. Now a new state of things was inaugurated; balls, lawn parties, and receptions became the order of the day, or rather night, at the banker's elegant residence, and the young mistress of this hospitable home was the brightest star in the constellation of society beauties that shone in the firmament of this southern town. It must be confessed that this innovation did not exactly suit Mr. Gilbert's quiet tastes. Being much in love with his young wife, however, and moreover having an intuition, which he had never been able to banish, that she was not wholly happy, he demurred not at anything that might give her pleasure. "If she has a secret sorrow, and can find solace for it in society, why should she not accept it?" he said to himself, with all the greatness of heart characteristic of his noble nature. So he smiled on her whims indulgently, while she received the homage paid her by society, in her own queenly way. Leah was very fond of Ruth, and the little girl fairly adored her "pretty mamma," as she proudly called her; and as the banker would not permit the care of his child to become a burden to his young wife, all went well. So passed the first year of their married life, and then another child was born at Myrtle Villa.

"See what the good angels have brought us, darling," said the proud father, as he held the astonished Ruth up to peep into the downy nest, where reposed the late addition to the happy family. "A little sister for you."

The child looked with big round eyes for a moment at the little pink face and then said, with a frown, "I don't want a sister, I don't want anybody but Herbie. Please make the angels take her away aden, papa, and we will send Dicey to bring Herbie to stay in her place."

They all laughed at the child-speech, and Mr. Gilbert said to his smiling wife, "Ruth does not intend that Herbert shall have a rival in her affections at any rate."

Miss Moore and the little boy still resided at Palm Cottage, and the care and devotion the maiden lady showered upon the orphan child was a beautiful example of motherly love which many a fashionable mother might well have emulated.

CHAPTER XXII.

It was just three months after the birth of the banker's second daughter, whom they had named Esther, and Mrs. Gilbert was that night to make her first appearance in society since the birth of the child. The occasion was a grand ball given in honor of a Spanish grandee, who had been visiting the city once owned by his noble ancestors. It would have been a difficult matter for one who had not seen Leah since she came to St. Augustine, as private secretary and companion of the late Mrs. Gilbert, to have recognized this superbly dressed and stately lady as the pale, quiet, and altogether unassuming girl known at that time as Leah Mansden.

The French creole maid, with many an involuntary exclamation of delight, was just putting the finishing touches to the lady's superb toilet, who stood, a vision of loveliness, before a large beveled French mirror in her elegant dressing-room, when a boy appeared at the door with a note for Mrs. Gilbert. The lady recognized Martha's handwriting at a glance, and hastily breaking the seal, read :

"Come to the cottage immediately. Herbert is very sick.

"MARTHA."

"Is the carriage ready?" Leah asked quickly, addressing the maid.

"It is, Madame, but ze master has returned not yet. He left ze house shortly after tea, and ze Madame remembers he said he would return not until ten o'clock, and now it is only nine."

Theresa lisped her broken English prettily, as she glanced at the silver and gold clock ticking musically upon its daintily carved shelf.

"It is yet too early for ze Madame to go to ze ball," she said.

"Miss Moore has sent for me. Her little boy is very ill, and I am going at once to Palm Cottage," Mrs. Gilbert replied calmly.

"*Mon Dieu !*" exclaimed Theresa, aghast at the announcement. "Ze Madame vill go not to zee ze zick child, dressed as zhe is in von beautiful, von zuberbè ball costume ?"

Mrs. Gilbert cut her expostulation short by saying :

"I must go immediately. Bring my long dark circular cloak from the wardrobe, Theresa."

"Vy not zend me instead, Madame ?" further remonstrated the disturbed maid as she brought her mistress the desired garment. "It vas more fitting zat I go to von cottage to administair to ze zick boy, zan Madame, dressed in von zuberbè costume, wiz ze diamonds already in ze hair, on ze neck, and ze arms. *Mon Dieu !* Madame might be robbed on ze street. Zen, zink, Madame, ze night air vill take all ze crimp out of ze lovely hair, all ze pearl powder off ze beautiful cheeks and neck, and ze zuberbè costume vill be crushed."

But the lady had enveloped her form quickly beneath the protecting folds of the dark cloak, and was leaving the room before Theresa had finished the list of accidents liable to be-

fall her mistress if she persisted in her determination to go at once to Palm Cottage.

“Tell Mr. Gilbert, when he returns,” she called back as her feet touched the hall, “that he will find me at Palm Cottage,” and in a moment more her hurried footsteps descended the stairs, and leaving the house, she sprang into the waiting carriage, and giving her order to the coachman, was driven rapidly away.

“*Mon Dieu !*” exclaimed Theresa, as she heard the front door close after her mistress’ departure from the house—“*Mon Dieu !* going to ze little cottage on St. George Street in zat beautiful, zuberbè costume to zee ze zick child of von poor woman! Oh, if heaven had been kind to me, and given me ze wealth of Madame, so zat I too could have had ze beautiful clothes, ze fine diamonds, ze rich laces, I would not so leetle appreciation have as to trouble my head over ze poor people an’ ze zick children.” And Theresa, with a look of unutterable contempt for what she considered her mistress’ folly, turned back to the dressing-room and began to restore it to its usual orderly appearance.

Meantime, Leah, having been put down in front of Palm Cottage, ascended the steps quickly, and as quickly crossed the little piazza, and, entering unannounced, ran up the stairs, her satin garments rustling softly, and soon stood before Martha, who had just placed the sick child in his crib.

“Oh, Leah! he has had two dreadful convulsions. I feared he would die before you could get here,” was Martha’s greeting.

“How long has he been sick, and why did you not let me



"Tell Mr. Gilbert . . . that he will find me at Palm Cottage."—Page 134.

know sooner?" were Leah's hurried questions, as, with loudly beating heart and blanched cheeks, she bent over the suffering child.

"He was taken suddenly ill this evening about eight o'clock. The servant had gone for the night, and I had to leave him alone while I was looking for a boy by whom I sent the note to you. I also told the boy to call at Dr. Cadova's office, and ask the physician to come here immediately. When I returned to the room, I found the child in the second convulsion. Since he came out of it he is sleeping and seems easier, but I do hope Dr. Cadova will soon come."

The little boy was arrayed in his snowy night-dress; the yellow curls shone like coils of gold against his white brow. Dark circles lay under the closed eyes, and his face flushed and paled alternately. As Leah bent over him, a low moan escaped the slightly parted lips, and fell like a stab on her anguished heart.

"Martha, we must have a physician immediately. The child is very ill."

She walked to the front window as she spoke, and lifting the sash, threw open the shutters and stood listening intently for a moment, hoping to hear the coming of the physician for whom Martha had sent; but no passer-by paused at the gate, and closing the window, the young mother turned back to the bedside of the suffering child, just in time to catch the little form to her aching heart as it began to quiver in another convulsion.

"Martha, for God's sake, run for the doctor yourself. The child will die if something is not done for his speedy relief."

A moment later Martha was flying bare-headed along the

almost deserted street that led to the office of Mrs. Gilbert's family physician. She had not far to go, but when she reached the office she found it dark, closed, and deserted. In despair she was turning away to seek another physician, when she ran against a gentleman who had just alighted from a carriage drawn up to the sidewalk.

"I beg your pardon, madam," the gentleman said politely, as he stepped aside to allow the woman to pass.

"It is I who should ask pardon," replied the distressed Martha. "I did not see you. I was running to find a physician for my child, who is so very sick that I fear he will die before I can find one. Oh, sir, can you tell me where I may be likely to find a doctor?"

"Being a stranger in this city, I am sorry that I cannot give you the needed information, but I, myself, am a physician, and my services are at your disposal."

"Oh, how fortunate!" she exclaimed in a tone of relief. "Then please come with me with all possible haste."

Without another word the man turned to accompany her, and five minutes later the two entered the room at Palm Cottage, where Mrs. Gilbert was watching with the sick child. The little sufferer had grown calm again, and was quietly resting on the snowy pillows of the crib.

The bedroom lamp was burning dimly upon the table, and Mrs. Gilbert sat by the child's side holding one of its feverish hands. The dark cloak which covered the magnificent ball-dress still enveloped her form, making the diamonds which flashed from her hair and upon the white uncovered wrist of the hand which held that of the child's shine with a strange, incongruous effect.



“Mrs. Gilbert had dropped the child’s hand, risen to her feet and stood confronting the stranger.”—Page 137.

Martha flung open the door, and the tall gentlemanly-appearing stranger followed her. He had left his hat, light overcoat, and gloves in the hall below, and entered the room with a quiet professional air.

"I could not find Dr. Cadova," Martha said; "but, fortunately, I met another physician who was kind enough to come with me. How is the poor little darling?" and Martha, with her face white and drawn with anxiety, bent her head over the sleeping boy.

Mrs. Gilbert had dropped the child's hand, risen to her feet, and stood confronting the stranger. He was a tall, elegant-looking man of apparently twenty-five years of age, erect and graceful in figure, with deeply-bronzed complexion, black curly hair, and dark silky mustache. He stood looking at the beautiful woman before him with a look of amazement in his large black eyes, that for a moment held him spellbound and speechless.

In that one moment of breathless silence the mist of years was swept aside from Leah's vision. The wreck of disappointed hopes which had marked her pathway disappeared. The hours of watching and waiting, the anguish of cherishing a "hope long deferred," the tears, the prayers, the final weak yielding to temptation,—all, all dissolved in the bright sunlight of happiness that flooded her soul in this supreme moment when, instead of accosting a stranger, she stood face to face with the husband of her girlhood. The grave had given up its dead, and the loved and lost one had returned to claim her as his own. Oh moment of delusive happiness! What infinite kindness had her soul taken flight to its eternal home before consciousness returned,

bringing all the hideous facts that existed to forever rear their hydra-heads, mocking her for her lost happiness !

She tottered a few steps toward the stranger and extended her cold hands, crying : “ Herbert, Herbert ! Thank God that you have come at last.” Her voice sounded faint and broken, as one speaking in the delirium of fever, and the import of her words did not reach the ears of Martha, who was still anxiously bending over the sick child. Then she heard the voice of the man, in tones she never forgot to her dying day, so full of love and tenderness and joyful surprise were they, crying : “ My darling, my darling, my love, my wife, my precious wife ! ” and lifting her startled head, she gazed at the scene before her—a scene which at first sight struck her dumb and helpless.

Leah had been gathered to the strange physician’s heart. His arms enfolded her in a passionate clasp. Her white bare arms, upon which the costly gems were flashing, were wound about his neck, while the lips of the pair met in a long loving kiss, such as must thrill departed souls who have loved in life, borne the anguish of separation brought about by death, and are at last reunited on the blissful shores of immortality.

“ In the name of God, what is the meaning of this ? ” cried Martha at length ; and the pallor which had been spread over her strong features by anxiety for the sick child was replaced by a burning wave of indignation. “ What do you mean, I say, by such unholy conduct ? ” and the woman strode with firm, determined step in front of the pair still clasped in one another’s arms. The man raised his head and looked into the questioner’s angry face.

“ Martha,” he said gently, “ is it possible that you do not

recognize me—Leah's husband, Herbert Raymond, from whom she was separated by the most cruel mischance.

One moment of bewilderment came into Martha's face as she listened to the man's words and looked into his eyes; then the recognition was complete.

"Dare you, villain that you are, call yourself the husband of a woman whose heart you won in her innocent childhood, only for the vile purpose of breaking it? You, who deserted her before the first fortnight of your wedded life had passed, and have left her ever since to bear the shame and burden alone that your sins brought upon her? Dastardly wretch!" she cried, her eyes fairly blazing with righteous wrath, "take your arms from about this woman, who is polluted by your unholy touch, and leave this house before I give you into the hands of the police."

She laid hold of Leah's arm as she spoke, and tried to draw her from his embrace.

"Woman," he cried in a deep voice, trembling with excitement and anger, "touch her not; take your hands from my wife's arm. I have found her, thank God, after years of weary searching, and now no power on earth, in heaven, or in hell shall separate us. She is my wife, my own: loosen your grasp on her arm, I tell you, before I forget that you are a woman!" and his eyes blazed with almost insane wrath.

"Leah, Leah!" cried the distracted Martha, appealing to the young woman lying with inert form in the man's strong grasp, while her head lay passively on his broad breast. "Leah, will you permit this—*will you permit it*, knowing all that you do; will you permit this villain to hold you in his arms and call you by the holy name of wife?"

"She is my wife, woman, and I dare any power on earth to take her from me," the man cried vehemently.

"She knows that you speak falsely," Martha said, with a calmness that bore conviction with it. "She is not your wife, but the wife of an honorable citizen of this city, and the mother of his child."

"Leah, Leah, for God's sake tell me that the woman lies," he cried, bending his white face over the one reposing upon his breast.

"God have mercy upon me, Herbert!" Leah moaned. "God have mercy upon us both! Oh, that I had died before this confession was forced upon me;—she speaks the truth: I am another man's wife. Oh, my love, my love! why did you desert me, and let me think you dead for five long, weary years?"

She straightened herself up as she spoke, as if she had suddenly realized the awful gulf which lay between her and her first love. The man's arms relaxed their hold from about her form, and he staggered back as if he had received a sudden and stunning blow in the face.

"Another man's wife!—another man's wife!" he repeated in a dazed manner, as he clasped his hands to his throbbing temples. "Merciful God! Oh, Leah, Leah, have I only found you to bear the double pain of knowing that you are lost to me forever?" He sank on his knees and buried his face in his hands as he moaned out: "It cannot—it must not be true."

The sick child, which had slept peacefully upon its downy pillows, all unconscious of the throes of anguish rending the hearts of its parents, stirred uneasily, and Martha, with a

white, grim face, returned to her watch beside its crib. Leah knelt beside the man's kneeling figure and tried to draw his hands from his face.

"Oh, Leah!" he cried with white lips, "as soon should I have suspected God's angels of being untrue as yourself."

"Herbert, why did you desert me all these years? I thought that you were dead; for I did not believe that anything but death would have kept you from coming to claim me as your wife. Oh, speak, and tell me why you did not keep your vows; and then all these cruel mistakes had been avoided. Oh, how I grieved and wept, waited and prayed for your return, only He who understands the human heart knows. Why did you desert me, Herbert, when I loved you so?" she sobbed.

He took her cold hands between his trembling ones and said wearily: "I did not desert you, Leah; as God is my witness, I did not. I was a victim to the most cruel accident that ever shattered a man's happiness and wrecked his life. Listen while I relate what happened to me after I bade you good-bye, as I thought, for a short time, and then you will acquit me of all blame."

As the man uttered these words the sound of carriage wheels fell upon the ears of the three distracted persons in the sick child's room; hurried footsteps ascended the steps, crossed the small porch, and soon the ring of the door-bell sounded through the little house.

"It is Mr. Gilbert—my husband!" faltered Leah, springing to her feet, while a burning blush suffused her pale face.

"Your husband! Oh, my God!" groaned the man, again burying his face in his hands.

Leah laid her hand a moment on his bowed head in tender pity ; then, turning in alarm to Martha, said : “ Go, Martha, and show Mr. Gilbert into the parlor ; I will be down in a moment.”

“ For heaven’s sake, be careful,” the woman said, as her hand rested on the door-knob. “ If the relations once sustained between you two become publicly known, the heart of the noblest man on earth will be broken.” With this she left the room, softly closing the door after her.

“ Yes, Herbert, we must be careful, and, for the sake of others, keep our secret sacred.”

“ But, Leah, I will never give you up,” he said, springing up and grasping her arm—“ never : you are my lawfully wedded wife, and death to him who dares to come between us.”

“ Oh, hush ! for mercy’s sake,” she cried entreatingly ; “ you know not what you say. You had better plunge a dagger into my heart than betray me.”

She grew so ashen white at the danger that menaced her that he put out his hand involuntarily to support her.

“ Meet me here to-morrow night at nine o’clock, and I will explain what kept me from your side,” he whispered, as footsteps were heard approaching the door outside, and Martha’s voice saying :

“ He is sleeping nicely now, but I think you had better not come into the room, Mr. Gilbert, for fear it might disturb him.”

“ Nonsense, Miss Moore,” laughed the voice of a man, which Leah recognized as Mr. Gilbert’s. “ I am used to babies : I will not disturb the little fellow in the least.”

“Don’t betray me, for Christ’s sake,” Leah whispered, half crazed by fright. “You are only the physician called to attend the sick child.”

“God give me strength to sustain my part,” the man said through his set teeth, as he approached the crib and took the child’s delicate wrist in his hand and felt for the pulse ; “but to-morrow night—to-morrow night, Leah, for God’s sake, do not fail to meet me.”

“If I live, I will be here,” she panted breathlessly, as the door flew open admitting Martha, pale and harassed to death, with Mr. Gilbert close upon her heels. Mrs. Gilbert drew her cloak more closely about her, and stood with eyes riveted upon the sick child’s face. The banker was in full evening dress, and looked handsome and stylish as he paused beside the bed of the sick boy, and said anxiously, as he noted his wife’s colorless face : “Why, Leah, are you so frightened about the condition of the child? or are you ill yourself? You are as pale as death itself. What is the matter, little one?” and his wife’s hand, which he took fondly within his own as he spoke, trembled in his tender grasp.

“The child has had convulsions, and I was very much alarmed for his safety,” she said with dry lips, and not daring to raise her eyes to Mr. Gilbert’s face.

The banker’s eyes wandered from the troubled face of his wife to that of the sleeping boy, and after placing his white hand for a moment on the child’s curly head, said : “I think you are needlessly alarmed, my love ; the child is sleeping quietly, has not much fever, and will, no doubt, soon be all right again. I suppose this gentleman is the physician ; ask him if my surmises are not correct.”

The physician, who had been bending over the child, raised his head, and his eyes and the banker's met.

"Doctor Raymond—Mr. Gilbert," Leah said, in a strangely faltering tone, and the hands of the two men, holding such strange relations to one another, were clasped in a semblance of friendship.

"The child is not alarmingly ill," Dr. Raymond said, and his voice was low and husky. "Give the medicine as directed, and I will see the patient again in the morning." Then turning abruptly, he said: "Good-evening," and bowed himself out of the room.

"What a crusty doctor!" said Mr. Gilbert, as they heard the front door close on the physician's retreating form. "How did you happen to call him instead of Dr. Cadova, Miss Moore?"

"Dr. Cadova was absent, and I met this physician accidentally," she said in a low voice, giving a quick, half-frightened glance into Mrs. Gilbert's face as she spoke.

"Well, I suppose he will do as well as any one," he replied; then turning to his wife, said: "My dear, what about going to the ball?"

"I do not see how I can leave Miss Moore alone with the child," she faltered.

"We will send a servant from the villa to stay with her," he said kindly; and poor Leah, her heart sore with pain, her head aching and bewildered, and her eyes heavy with their weight of unshed tears, was led away to attend the evening's festivities, when she was longing for the quiet of the peaceful grave to hide her and her sorrows forever from mortal sight.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"Oh, Leah, I cannot give you up ; you little dream of the intensity of my love when you require such a sacrifice at my hands. You are my first and only love, my lawfully wedded wife ; my only hope of happiness lies in being reunited with you, my darling."

The scene is in the tiny parlor at Palm Cottage. The time, ten o'clock the night following the first meeting of Leah and Herbert Raymond, after five years of weary separation, when each, true to the appointment made on that memorable night, met again to discuss a subject which had driven them both to the very verge of despair.

Leah, under the pretense of visiting Miss Moore's sick child, had left her palatial home, with its bright lights and elegant appointments, and repaired to the humble cottage to meet the man whose failure to keep his vows to her had caused her to commit a crime against God and man.

"Do not see this man again, Leah," Martha had pleaded when Leah appeared at the cottage. "He has acted a villain's part toward you. You owe him nothing but your everlasting hatred. Defy him. He cannot harm you. Refuse to see or speak to him again, and return home and be happy in the love of your noble husband and beautiful little girl."

"Martha, I have promised to listen to his explanations, and this promise I shall keep, regardless of all any one could say to dissuade me," she answered in a decisive manner, as she pushed her pleading friend aside and entered the parlor, lighted only by a small lamp which cast a dim light over the objects in the room.

She had not long to wait till a footstep, the sound of which had once filled her heart with joy, fell upon her listening ear, and the next moment Herbert Raymond stood before her.

He was very pale, and the expression on his symmetrically molded features was such as might have been worn by a man coming to beg for clemency at the hand of some mighty ruler, in behalf of a dear one, upon whom the sentence of death had been passed.

When the door closed and he was alone with the woman he loved with all the passion of his intense nature, he reached his arms toward her, crying :

"Leah, my own beloved !"

But she waved him back with a haughty gesture.

"Do not touch me," she said coldly, "or utter one word of endearment. I have met you as I promised, but I came only to hear your pitiful explanation of why you so basely deserted me."

"My love, I did not desert you. Believe me, Leah, not for the wealth of the whole world, or for the hope of eternal happiness in heaven, would I have been guilty of so dastardly a wrong against you."

He took her cold trembling hands and looked into the fair troubled face as he spoke.

She answered him not, but stood looking into his pleading eyes, doubtingly.

“ You are cold and trembling, dear one ; sit down while I tell you of the unfortunate accident which separated me from you—an accident which almost deprived me of my life. Now, after years of weary searching, when I have found you only to hear the awful revelation from your own lips that you have given yourself to another. I wonder that God in His tender mercy spared my life, to have this thousand times worse fate than death forced upon me.”

He seated her upon a sofa as he spoke, and drawing up a chair in front of her, seated himself and wiped the cold drops of perspiration from his brow.

“ Our interview may be interrupted at any moment,” she said coldly. “ I am ready to hear your explanation.”

“ Oh, Leah, how can you speak so coldly to me ? ”

She silenced him with an entreating look, and said :

“ Remember I came here only to hear an explanation of your strange conduct toward me.”

He looked at her a moment in pained silence. Could this queenly woman who sat before him, with that look of haughty defiance on her face, be the same loving, confiding girl he had wooed and won ? The transformation seemed impossible.

“ Will you not proceed ? I have already reminded you that our interview must be brief,” she said in a cold tone.

He clasped his hands with a despairing gesture, and began :

“ Leah, man never loved woman more fondly or devotedly

than I loved you, and when, after three weeks of sweet wedded bliss, I bade you farewell, and tore myself from your side, I cursed the circumstances which forced even a brief separation upon us.

“The next day after my arrival at the home of my parents in New York city, while out driving with my father, the horses took fright and became unmanageable, and dashing madly down Broadway, the carriage was upset, and my father and I were thrown violently to the ground. He escaped with a broken arm, but I was not so fortunate; in falling, my head struck the pavement with great force. For a few moments I was stunned, and then partially recovered consciousness, after which I sank into a profound stupor. The most eminent surgeons were summoned, and, upon examination of my case, diagnosed the injury as rupture of a blood-vessel in the membranes between the brain and the skull. The effusion of blood from its pressure upon the brain had produced the stupor which would eventually end in death. To the heart-broken appeals of my parents, as to whether anything could possibly be done for me, the surgeon in attendance replied that, until recently, such cases always proved fatal, and even now this is the usual result, for comparatively few surgeons know of the advances made in the science of brain-surgery.

“The only hope of saving my life was to trephine the skull at the injured point and let out the blood which had been extravasated.

““Whether the patient will survive the operation or not, I am unable to state, but his only chance of recovery lies in

this one thing : I advise you to proceed with him to Germany at once, and place him under the care of Professor Francius Steinman at Elberthal, who is the most celebrated surgeon of the age.'

" 'To Germany?' said my father in amazement. 'Will the patient live in his present condition to reach the end of this long journey?'

" 'Oh, yes, in all probability he will survive for weeks in his present condition, although he will never recover consciousness until the operation is successfully performed,' replied the surgeon.

" Accordingly, the next day, my unconscious form, watched over by my heart-broken parents, was carried on board a steamer, which, an hour later was *en route* to Germany. Upon our arrival at Elberthal my case was placed in the hands of the scientific surgeon already mentioned, who proceeded to trephine the skull at the injured point. As soon as the pressure was relieved, I gained consciousness, and, my darling, the first thought that flashed through my mind was of you.

" When I was permitted to converse, I told my parents of my secret marriage, and begged of them to send for you at once.

" They were at first amazed and dumfounded at the revelation, then the thought came to them that my declaration of having made a secret marriage was only a fancy of my disordered brain. Without my knowledge, they consulted the surgeon in regard to the matter, telling him how improbable it was that my declaration be true.

" He replied that, in all probability, it was a phantasm,

caused by the injury I had sustained and my subsequent weakness. He advised them, however, to appear to humor me in the whim, and, as I regained strength, the fancy would in all probability pass away and be forgotten.

“ ‘Have you sent for my precious wife?’ I cried in a fever of impatience, when my parents again stood by my bedside.

“ My father dropped his eyes and walked away, but my mother patted me lovingly on the cheek, and said in a half whisper :

“ ‘Yes, dear.’

“ ‘Are you sure you were correct about the address?’ I further demanded.

“ ‘Oh, yes indeed. I wrote it exactly as you gave it to us.’

“ ‘And how many days must elapse before she will come to me?’ was my next eager question.

“ ‘I cannot speak positively, my love, but I suppose she will arrive within two weeks.’

“ ‘Two weeks ! Two long weeks ! Oh, that the doctor could give me something to make me sleep the time away, for how can I bear those hours of weary waiting ?’

“ Oh, little did I dream then of the years of weary waiting which lay in store for me.

“ ‘You must be patient, dear heart,’ my mother said fondly. ‘By impatient fretting you will retard your recovery, or, perhaps, cause your death. Here, drink this, and when you have slept you will feel stronger and more courageous.’

“ She held a sleeping potion to my lips, and ere long I sank into a deep sleep, to dream of the bliss in store for me when my dear one should be restored to my loving arms.

“But the days so filled with misery for my impatient spirit dragged slowly past and merged into weeks, until a month had gone by. Still no news came from over the sea that you were coming to join me, or that you had even received the communications which I had sent you.

“I fumed and fretted, and finally raved over the delay till I brought on an attack of brain fever, which reduced life to its very lowest ebb.

“After my physicians and friends had given up all hope of my recovery, my vital powers finally asserted themselves, the feeble spark of life remaining was fanned into flame, and ere long my convalescence was joyfully announced to me.

“The news brought me a thrill of pleasure, for, as soon as my strength would in the least admit, I intended to start home in search of my wife.

“To my amazement and almost despair, I found that three months had elapsed since my unfortunate accident in New York city. I tortured myself with questions as to how you had stood the long separation, or why you did not reply to the many letters which my parents assured me they had written you.

“Long before my friends considered me able to endure the fatigue of a journey I, in company with my parents, was journeying homeward. Upon arriving in New York, I sent a telegram to your home-address, informing you of my return, but the message was returned with the information that the person addressed could not be found. Fearing unutterable things I started immediately for your western home. Upon my arrival there I found your house closed and deserted. Inquiry among the neighbors elicited the facts of Mrs.

Mansden's sudden death and your own removal. Whither you had gone no one could inform me, or give me the least clew to aid me in my search.

“Driven almost to insanity by my failure, I returned to New York, and the weary searching for you, my darling, began. Everything that wealth could do, or ingenuity suggest, was done to discover your whereabouts. Nearly five years the search continued. To find you, or in some way learn your fate, became the one passion of my life, which absorbed every other interest.

“During this time my parents died, and up to the time of their death they thought the fact, which I declared to be true, of my having made a secret marriage, and subsequently becoming separated from my wife, and she lost to me in the crowded, jostling world, an insane freak, which had no origin except in my own brain, which had received such a terrible injury in the accident which befell me. But, as I was perfectly sane on all other subjects, they did not seek to restrain me, and humored me in what they thought a whim. God only knows what kept me from becoming the madman they thought me, for during all those years of torturing anxiety not one thing occurred to bring hope to my broken heart until I came suddenly face to face with you in this old southern town.

“And now, ah, God! The pity of it all. You dash the ecstatic joy which illumined the dismal recesses of my tortured heart, after having found you at last, by informing me that you have wedded another. Oh! Leah, tell me, for Christ's sake, how I shall endure this and not do some awful deed?”

His face was pale as death, with every feature set with the intensity of anguish that swept in despairing waves over his heart.

The woman who sat before him in stony silence during his astonishing recital, as though she were listening to a sentence which doomed her to everlasting woe, approached his side hurriedly, and drew his head to her breast.

"Herbert," she wailed, "why did I ever let you leave me, or why were not my eyes closed in death before this meeting, which, ah, just Heaven! has come too late?"

"If you had only remained true to me, my beloved, as I have been to you. Oh! the joy of this meeting which never could have come too late," he replied, in a voice in which love and reproach were strangely mingled. "Why did you wed another? I never could have been so disloyal to you, even had I known you were dead or false to me."

"Herbert," she cried, "do not reproach me in this, my supreme hour of anguish. You little dream of the suffering I endured before I yielded to the temptation which beset me. Homeless, penniless, friendless, and, more than all, thinking you either dead or false, is it to be wondered at that, when the love and protection of an honorable and wealthy man were offered me, I yielded to the temptation and became his wife? I am only human; and, oh, Herbert! the pangs and loneliness of poverty are hard to bear. Little do you know, you who have always been blessed with plenty of friends and abundance of wealth, how hard it is for a weak, friendless woman, thrown upon her own resources, to fight a hand-to-hand battle with poverty and never yield to temptation."

She passed her trembling hand across his throbbing brow and held his head close to her aching heart as she spoke, while her hot tears fell in a heavy shower upon his dark, clustering curls.

"This must be our last meeting, my love," she said in a choking voice; "but ere we part, you must, in face of all the extenuating circumstances which appear in my behalf, say that you forgive me."

He put his arm around her and drew her to him, holding her firmly to his loudly beating heart, as though he defied the whole world to take her from him.

"Nay, my darling," he said, as she struggled to free herself, rest so, if it is only for the few moments it will take you to tell me where you have been hiding all these years that marked the days of my fruitless search for you. Leah, beloved, rest your head on my breast while you tell me. God in heaven knows that this is its rightful resting-place, whatever man may say to the contrary."

Passively she yielded to his passionate entreaty, as if she were too overwhelmed with her burden of woe to resist him.

In a broken voice and between her sobs she told him all that had transpired in her life since she had parted from him,—told him of the birth of their child and her temptation to pass herself as an unmarried woman, and as such, yielded to the temptation to marry Mr. Gilbert, who had not the slightest suspicion of her former marriage, or the birth of her child. She did not seek to spare herself, but laid her whole soul bare before him in all its weakness, sorrow, and sin.

The conflicting emotions which surged through the man's

heart, as he listened to the confession, would be impossible for any pen to describe.

Amazement, indignation, sorrow, and love held high carnival in the heart that, before hearing this confession, would have sworn that, though the sun should forget to rise, the moon turn to blood, and the stars wander from their courses, and all nature become a chaotic mass, still would this woman, this love of his youth, whose image he had set upon a pedestal to worship as the embodiment of all that is beautiful in truth, love, innocence, and loyalty, be true to every God-given instinct with which Heaven has endowed woman. He looked back upon his weary, harassing search for her, with the feeling that they contained naught but days of bliss compared to this hour of heart-sickening sorrow, when the terrible fact was forced upon him that his idol was merely clay. That, having been weighed in the balance, this creature, whom he thought but little lower than the angels in heaven, had been found woefully, ah! so woefully wanting, as to deny her first love, and even repudiate her own child, for gold and a life of luxurious ease.

The silence which had fallen between them after Leah had ceased speaking, and which had continued for several moments, was at last broken by the unhappy woman, who raised her head and looked into the man's face with its white set lips, and said piteously :

“ Herbert, will you not say that you forgive me ? ”

“ Leah,” he said, “ you have suffered, this I know, but the question of forgiveness for the sin you have committed lies between you and your God. I will not reproach you. We

are both the victims of as unfortunate a circumstance as ever harassed the human soul. I will go and leave you in peace, but only on one condition,—and that is, that you relinquish all rights to my child and give him wholly into my care.”

She sprang to her feet, and stood facing him with defiance flashing from her eyes.

“Have no fear,” he said soothingly; “the child’s well-being shall now become the one thought of my life. I shall not betray you. You say the child is known as a motherless one, which was placed by its father in Miss Moore’s keeping. That father has now come, as he has a perfect right, to claim his own. This circumstance will elicit no inquiry, and but little comment, so you need have no fears of being exposed to harm.”

“Oh, Herbert! My God! What greater harm could overtake me than to be compelled to give up my child? The little boy sent me by Heaven, when I was alone and friendless, and thought myself a deserted wife. It was only the touch of his soft baby fingers, the light of his innocent smile, the sound of his cooing voice, that saved me from a suicide’s grave. “How can I give him up? You little dream of the blessing he has been to me.”

“Still, to the world you denied him, and as the circumstances are, must ever disown him,” he said in tones of concentrated bitterness.

She covered her face with her hands and burst into tempestuous weeping and smothered lamentations.

The man did not touch her or utter one comforting word.

“I am going to the sick child’s room, Leah,” he said at

length, "and I hope, ere I return, you will have regained your calmness."

He started toward the door, but she sprang after him, crying wildly:

"You will not take my boy, Herbert! your heart will not permit you to be so cruel after all I have suffered!"

"There is only one way in which you may retain the child in your keeping, and that is to go with him and me," he said with deep significance.

She sank back on the sofa with a groan pitiful to hear, as he left the room and softly closed the door.

When he entered the room where Martha watched by the bedside of the sick child, he found the little fellow propped up with pillows, and, although quite pale, he was bright and smiling.

Little Herbert laid down the toy with which he had been amusing himself, and placed his tiny hand confidingly in that of Dr. Raymond, who felt the pulse in the small wrist, and looked lovingly into the clear blue eyes of the child raised innocently to his own. At length he laid down the child's hand, and turning to Miss Moore, said:

"Martha, you, of course, know who I am, and I will take this opportunity to tell you that, by the words you uttered to me last night, I am aware that you blame me for all the trouble that has fallen to Leah's lot to bear."

"How could I do otherwise, knowing as I do all the circumstances in the case?" replied Martha grimly.

"But you are mistaken," he said kindly, "when you surmise that you know all the circumstances; for the most

important ones, and those which change the whole nature of this unhappy affair, are wholly unknown to you."

"Martha,"—suddenly,—“as you were my friend in the dear old days,—the like of which will never be known to me again in my life—will you go down to the parlor and ask Leah, who is still there, to acquaint you with the fatal circumstances which have wrecked the happiness of two lives?”

She darted an anxious look toward the occupant of the cradle, who had returned to his toys, and said apprehensively :

“Leave him alone with you? The child is not used to strangers and may be frightened.”

“Have no fears for him,” replied Dr. Raymond, and the eyes which held Martha’s own for one brief moment flashed with a determined light. “I will see that no harm comes to my child. I am his father, and fully capable of taking care of him now as well as in the future.”

“What do you mean?” she gasped with ashen lips.

“I mean that I wish to be left alone for a few moments with my child,” he answered sternly.

“But you will not harm him?” she cried.

“Am I a monster that I would harm my own flesh and blood?” he replied.

“You will not take him from me?” she cried pitifully.

“Go in peace. When you return you will find the child here safe and unharmed.”

He motioned the woman away impatiently, and when she had left the room, closed the door and turned the key softly in the lock, realizing, with a thrill of joy that stirred his sore heart, that he was alone with his own child.

CHAPTER XXIV.

SCARCELY had Martha's feet touched the lower landing, when the door-bell was rung with a quick impatient hand.

Pausing a moment to press her hand to her loudly beating heart in an effort to calm her agitation, she opened the door, and Mr. Gilbert stood before her.

"Good-evening, Miss Moore," he said kindly, and then noting her pale face in the dim light of the hall lamp, added with much concern: "I trust the little boy has not grown worse?"

"Oh, no, thank you, Mr. Gilbert, the child's condition is very much improved; indeed, he is almost well," she replied quickly.

"I am pleased to hear you say this; but, Miss Moore, is my wife here? The servants could not tell me where she had gone, but I surmised she had come to see little Herbert. She was so alarmed about his condition last night that she was obliged to retire from the ball at an early hour, and has looked pale and troubled all day."

"Leah has such a warm, sympathetic heart," Martha replied nervously, and then added quickly: "But please walk in, Mr. Gilbert, and I will inform your wife that you have called for her."

"She is here then? I was right in my surmise," he said, as he followed Martha into the small sitting-room, on the left of the hall.

After he was seated, Martha left the room, and going into the parlor, closed and locked the door behind her.

She found the banker's wife crouched down upon the floor, with her face hidden in the sofa cushions.

"Leah, for God's sake, get up," she entreated in a low voice, "and try to calm yourself. Mr. Gilbert has called for you. I have told him that Herbert is out of danger; and how will you account for your condition, if you cannot conceal it?"

"Oh, Martha, Martha!" the young wife exclaimed in a voice of agony. "Herbert Raymond will take my boy away from me. Tell me how I can bear it, and give no sign that my heart is broken!"

"Hush, hush! for Heaven's sake," implored Martha, as she lifted the unhappy lady to her feet. "Nothing but courage and calmness will now save you from ruin and disgrace."

She half led, half carried Leah's almost fainting form into an adjoining chamber, and bathed the pale face, and smoothed down the disordered hair, imploring her, with every breath, to be calm before her husband's eyes fell upon her.

Martha's strong, positive nature finally had the desired effect upon that of the weaker one, and ere long Mrs. Gilbert joined the banker in the sitting-room.

"Little Runaway," he said affectionately, when she stood before him, "why did you not leave word for me at home where you were going?"

"I did not intend to be absent long," she said, trying with all the power she possessed to repress the agitation of her manner, "and thought I should return before you came home."

"Well, darling, if you are ready, get your wrappings and we will go at once. She hastened away, thankful for an opportunity to turn from his searching gaze, and going into the deserted parlor, gathered up her hat and mantle from where she had carelessly thrown them upon a chair, and a few minutes later was seated with Mr. Gilbert in the carriage on the way to Myrtle Villa. Upon their arrival home they found several guests, from their list of aristocratic friends, who had, with the pleasant informality practiced in this fair southern town, dropped in to spend an hour or two with the banker and his charming wife. The guests were all in exuberant spirits; and no better illustration of the power of mind over matter was ever displayed than was shown in the conduct of the charming hostess, who, bravely crushing her own heart-breaking sorrow into a remote background of her grief-laden soul, entered with seeming spirit into the gayety of her guests. It is pitiful how the poor human lips will sometimes smile with the semblance of joy, and the voice send out dulcet tones of happiness, when beneath all, unseen by only God and the pitying angels, lies a heart so beset and lacerated by the demons of woe and unrest, that the wonder of it is, how the anguish can be borne and still be hidden from earthly eyes.

Only to Mr. Gilbert was the shadow visible, which, during some pause in the conversation, flitted into his wife's lovely eyes.

This shadow he had always noted ever since he had first formed her acquaintance. It had puzzled him sorely to account for it, but, finding it impossible to trace its origin, he had concluded that it must have been inherited.

If he noticed that the shadow lay deeper to-night, he attributed it to the fact of her last night's vigils and anxiety concerning the sick child at Palm Cottage.

The next morning, soon after Mr. Gilbert left home for his office, a timid knock fell upon Mrs. Gilbert's door. When opened by the lady herself Martha stood on the threshold. She entered quickly, and when the door was closed, asked in a low voice, "Leah, are you alone?"

"Yes," was the answer almost in a whisper; "what news have you brought me?"

"This letter," and she drew a sealed missive from the pocket of her dress, and put it into the trembling hand of the banker's wife.

Leah clutched it eagerly, and when she glanced at the address her pale face grew scarlet, for she recognized the writing as that of the man she had loved and secretly wedded in her girlhood, a letter from whom once had the power to transport her to a heaven of bliss, but now made her tremble and grow faint at the danger which menaced her.

"Does it require an answer?" she whispered.

"Not at present," was the reply, "but you will know when the answer is expected after you have read it."

Leah hid the letter in the bosom of her elegant morning robe.

"How is the baby this morning?" she asked eagerly, using the pet name she usually applied to her first-born.

"He is very bright, and all sign of his recent illness is rapidly disappearing. Dr. Raymond called as usual this morning, and after turning me out of the room as he did last night, spent more than an hour alone with the boy. Then leaving the little fellow—whose childish heart he has completely won—asleep, he came into the sitting-room where I was sewing, and told me about the unfortunate circumstances which befell him."

Mrs. Gilbert raised her finger warningly, and Martha, dropping her voice still lower, continued:

"Oh, Leah, it was a terrible misfortune; he was not in the least to blame,"

Again Leah silenced her with a warning gesture.

"Say no more about it, Martha," she entreated, "until I come to you at the cottage; the very walls in this house have ears."

"When will you come?"

"This afternoon," was the reply, and Martha silently left the room, flitted down the broad staircase with its elaborately carved balustrade, and out of the house like a dark shadow.

When Leah found herself alone, she carefully locked the door, and with trembling fingers drew the letter from her bosom, and breaking the seal, read:

"Meet me at Palm Cottage at three o'clock this afternoon. Fear not. I shall go there ostensibly to visit the sick child.

"H. R."

Mrs. Gilbert tore the brief note into tiny atoms, and threw it with its envelope into the open grate, and even then took the precaution to kneel down and apply a lighted match to the fragments, watching them as they dissolved into feathery ashes and dropped into the ash-pan below.

"My dear," said the banker, as his wife and himself sat at their elegant luncheon, at two o'clock that afternoon, "I trust you have no engagement for this afternoon, as I have promised a party of friends, who are stopping for a short time in the city, that we would drive with them to Fort Marion."

"I am sorry to say that I shall be engaged from three o'clock until four this afternoon," she answered, without lifting her eyes.

"Are you expecting company?" he inquired.

"No," she answered briefly.

"Are you going out, or do you expect to spend this hour in the nursery with those precious babies of ours, whom you will persist in allowing to consume so much of your time?"

"I am going out," she said, raising her eyes to his quickly, but blushing in spite of herself.

"Why, you are blushing!" he laughed. "Now I must carry my impertinent questions further and find out where you are going, or I shall be growing jealous."

"You have no cause to be jealous," she said, trying to smile back at him, "for I am only going to Palm Cottage for an hour."

He arose from the table laughing.

"Little Humbug," he said, as they were leaving the lunch-

eon room ; “only going to sit awhile with Miss Moore and little Herbie, and you made such a mystery of it that my curiosity was thoroughly aroused.”

“Did I make a mystery of my engagement ?” she asked lightly. “I did not intend to do so.”

“Well, somehow you acted oddly about it ; you would not look at me for several minutes, and then blushed vividly, when you announced your intention of going out,” and he looked at her keenly. “But perhaps you were only trying to practice some of your old girlish wiles upon me, as you did in the days of our courtship.”

She breathed a sigh of relief, for at this stage in the light conversation they had reached the parlor door, and the banker, excusing himself on the plea of business, kissed his wife and left the house. Truly, “conscience doth make cowards of us all.”

CHAPTER XXV.

“THE child is all that is left to me to make life endurable. But for his existence, Leah, God only knows how I could gain courage to assert my manhood and not become a pitiful wreck, driven to despair by disappointed hopes and your unfaithfulness. But for the secrecy you preserved in regard to your past life when you married Mr. Gilbert, and for the birth of your unfortunate little daughter, I should claim you before the whole world as my own lawfully wedded wife, from whom I had become separated by the most cruel mischance that ever wrecked a man’s earthly happiness, and you, yourself, should choose between Mr. Gilbert and myself. But in pity for you, for your husband, and your innocent babe, who now bears the banker’s name, I will go my lonely way and leave you in peace ; but this I will do, as I have already said, only upon one condition.”

The speaker was Dr. Herbert Raymond, the person addressed the unhappy mistress of Myrtle Villa, who had met Dr. Raymond at Palm Cottage according to the appointment made in the brief note she had received from him in the morning. She sat before him, pale and limp ; so overshadowed by despair, that she could only answer his words with a smothered groan.

“Remember, Leah,” he continued more gently, his heart moved to a mighty pity at the sight of her distress, “that it is within your power to accompany the child and follow me and become my dearly beloved wife in the eyes of the world, as you are now in the eyes of God, regardless of any earthly barrier that has for a time separated us.”

“Publish my disgrace to the world, bring dishonor on the proud name of the noble man who has been my protector, break his loyal heart, and doom his innocent child and mine to a fate far worse than death! What a terrible alternative you would suggest!”

She spoke with wonderful calmness and looked at the tempter with dry eyes, the sparkle of which suggested how very near to the verge of insanity the woman had been driven.

“Then you love this man and his child better than you love my child and his father? Oh, the instability of the heart of woman!”

“Herbert, I love my good name next to my God. All other earthly love sinks into insignificance when compared with this, the ruling passion of my life,” she said solemnly.

“And God curse me if ever I do aught to sully the fair name of the woman I love,” he said reverently, and making the sign of the cross as he spoke.

She bowed her head with a devout gesture, and her lips moved as if in silent prayer.

“But you will give me the boy, Leah?” he pleaded at length in a low voice, rendered almost inaudible by emotion.

"God help me to endure the awful pain of the sacrifice ! Herbert, I will give you the child."

Their hands met in a lingering clasp, and the compact between the unhappy pair was sealed. Then he told her of his plans for his son. He would take him to his elegant home in New York, now only presided over by his housekeeper. The child's happiness and well-being would become the study of his life. When the child grew old enough, he would tell him of his mother, of whom God had deprived him while still in his babyhood. The picture of that mother should be presented to the child's mind, drawn from the beautiful ideal his father had worshiped before misfortune, with its destroying hand, had separated him from his innocent young wife ; before the rude hand of poverty and rough contact with the world had tempted that young wife to repudiate her early marriage vows, and prove disloyal to the holy crown of motherhood.

The sound of tiny pattering feet was heard in the hall, and soon baby hands were pounding for admission upon the panel of the parlor door, while a sweet voice floated to the ears of Herbert Raymond and the banker's wife, saying :

" Sister, sister, open the door, p'ease open the door. Herbie wants to tome in and see you."

With trembling hands Leah unlocked and opened the door, and clasping the child to her breaking heart, burst into a passion of tears and sobs.

" Sister, sister, don't c'y," cried the distressed child, trying to wipe her thickly falling tears away with his tiny hand.

"Darling," she sobbed, holding the boy away from her heart that she might better look into his beautiful face, "do not call me sister ; say 'mother'—say it just once, my darling, so that I may hear the holy name spoken by your sweet lips before we part forever."

The child looked at her in silent, frightened amazement.

"Herbie," she persisted, "will you not say 'mother' ?—say 'mother' just once, my darling," she pleaded passionately.

"Muver, muver," repeated the frightened child.

"God bless you for the word," she cried. "Now, put your little arms around my neck and say: 'I will always love you, mother.' "

He clasped his tiny arms around her neck obediently, and said: "Me will always love you, muver."

For a moment she held him in silent, passionate embrace, and then walking to Herbert Raymond's side, placed the child in his arms.

"Take him, Herbert, he is yours, and God deal with you as you deal with this precious charge."

"Amen," the man murmured reverently, as he clasped the child to his heart.

Then, without another word, Leah turned and fled from the room. Up the stairs she went like some wounded, frightened creature, half-mad with pain, and entering the child's nursery, she locked the door and threw herself face downward upon the floor, and, groveling there, gave full sway to her anguish.

How long she lay there she never knew. By and by the storm within her breast sobbed itself to rest, and ministering angels whispered to her breaking heart that God had ac-

cepted the sacrifice at her hands in atonement for the sin she had committed.

Feeling strangely comforted, she arose and bathed her heated face and adjusted her disordered dress.

"Leah, Leah," whispered the distressed voice of Martha through the closed door, "Mr. Gilbert has called for you with the carriage. He is waiting at the door. Will you see him?"

"Yes, bring me my hat and wrappings."

When the things were brought to her she went to the mirror and pinned on her hat with trembling fingers, and tied a veil closely over her pale face. Then throwing on her mantle and drawing on her gloves, she left the room with a wondrously firm step, and soon stood face to face with Mr. Gilbert, who was waiting her coming at the hall door. She glanced apprehensively toward the parlor as she passed, but the door was closed, the room silent, and she saw no one about the house.

"It is only five o'clock, Leah," was the banker's greeting "and we shall still have time to drive to Fort Marion before dark, if you will go, for our friends will be disappointed if we do not join them."

"Certainly I will go," she said pleasantly, "and I regret having kept you and them waiting so long."

He helped her tenderly into the carriage, and they drove away through the sparkling, level, western sunbeams of the winter afternoon.

She made an almost superhuman effort to appear as usual in her husband's eyes; but the eyes of love and devotion

are very keen-sighted, and ere long he startled her by saying: "Leah, you look as though you had been weeping. What has happened to disturb you, my love?"

She laughed lightly: "Women fall into a lachrymose state very easily, my dear," she said, "and it is not worth while to always inquire into the cause of their tears; for those tears, more frequently than otherwise, flow for a very trivial matter."

"But I cannot imagine what could happen at Palm Cottage to cause you the least distress," he said, still unconvinced by her argument.

She blushed a vivid scarlet, bit her full under-lip, and laughed lightly as she said:

"Miss Moore has been indulging in some reminiscences concerning her youth, which were very pathetic. She wept, and, of course, I needs must weep to keep her company."

"Tender-hearted child," he said, patting her gloved hand fondly, and appearing to be satisfied with her explanation; and then added thoughtfully: "If there is any unhappy influence brought to bear upon you at Palm Cottage, I shall insist upon your absenting yourself from there entirely."

To Leah's intense joy, as the banker made this remark, the spirited team rounded up to the house where the lady resided who was to join them in their drive, and the conversation was changed into another channel.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE party reached the massive, picturesque fort, and ascended the steps leading to its smoothly cemented parapet. The members of the party, except Mr. and Mrs. Gilbert, all being strangers at the fort, were soon deep in contemplating this magnificent specimen of mediæval fortification, with its bastions, moats, and outworks, while the banker and his wife, familiar with these scenes, promenaded arm in arm, enjoying the refreshing ocean breezes, as their eyes wandered from the calm blue waters of the bay to the magnificent line of white-capped breakers which appeared in the distance.

Suddenly they came face to face with the tall form of a young man walking slowly, his head lowered as if in earnest thought. The stranger suddenly stopped, lifted his head, and, in passing, raised his hat, while a deep flush mantled his pale face.

"Where have I seen that man?" said Mr. Gilbert, as the distance widened between them and the stranger. "Oh, I remember," he continued, as memory asserted itself. "It is the young physician whom we met at Palm Cottage."

Mrs. Gilbert made no answer, but her husband felt her

grasp upon his arm tighten and then suddenly relax. Her footsteps staggered a few paces, and then Mr. Gilbert turned his inquiring gaze upon her just in time to catch her fainting form in his arms. Attracted by the scene, the rest of the party hastened to the distressed husband's side.

"My wife has fainted," he exclaimed in great alarm. "Call the man who is descending the steps. He is a physician."

A gentleman ran to do his bidding, and soon returned bringing the physician with him.

"Place the lady in a recumbent position and loosen her clothing," the doctor ordered with professional coolness. He then took a glass of water from the hands of the sergeant, who, having heard the commotion, approached, bringing the desired fluid, and, kneeling down, bathed her unconscious face in its refreshing coolness. The deathly pallor of Mr. Gilbert's countenance was rivaled in whiteness by the color of the strange physician's face as he proceeded with his efforts to restore animation to the unconscious form. Even the frightened husband kneeling on the opposite side chafing his wife's cold hands between his own, noted the man's paleness, and cried out in alarm :

"My God, doctor, is my wife dead?"

"Oh, no, she will soon revive," he answered in a voice that belied his hopeful words. He took a small medicine case from his pocket as he spoke, and, selecting a tiny bottle therefrom, passed his arm under Mrs. Gilbert's head, and forced a few drops of the liquid between her blue lips, then resumed his kneeling position beside the inanimate form.

Soon the tightly closed lips relaxed, and a long-drawn sigh fluttered from between them. The violet eyes opened and looked with a bewildered stare into the physician's face.

"Herbert," she murmured, and the man shrank back, started to his feet, and retreated a few steps from the prostrate form.

"Thank Heaven, she is reviving. What did you say, my darling?" and Mr. Gilbert's anxious face came within his wife's vision.

"What has happened to me?" she asked in a frightened tone, as she tried to rise to a sitting posture.

"You fainted as we were walking on the parapet. It must have been caused from over-exertion. Don't you think so, doctor?" and Mr. Gilbert turned his face away from his wife in the direction where the physician had been standing. He was not there, but on the opposite side leaning against the wall, and looking intently toward Anastatia Island, as though in deep contemplation of its beauty.

"Shall I call the physician back to you, Leah?" asked her husband. "I am surprised at him leaving you so abruptly."

"No, do not call him, please," she answered with white lips. "Only help me to rise and we will go home."

"Are you sure you are able to walk to the carriage?" he asked, as he lifted his wife tenderly in his arms.

She assured him that she was much better, and a lady of the party brought her hat, while another smoothed back her damp, waving hair and readjusted her clothing.

Mr. Gilbert half carried her to the carriage, which stood

drawn up at the entrance, and when he had placed her tenderly therein, said :

“Lean against Mrs. Dunham a moment, dear, while I go back and speak to the physician.”

Mrs. Dunham, who had driven with them to the fort, placed her arm around Leah, who leaned her head against the lady's shoulder and closed her eyes, while the banker hurriedly entered the fort, ascended the stairs, and soon stood beside Dr. Raymond.

“I am deeply indebted to you for your kindness, Dr.— I beg your pardon, I have forgotten your name.”

“Raymond,” said the other, without turning his eyes from the shining waters of the bay.

“I do not know what we should have done,” continued Mr. Gilbert, “but for your opportune presence.”

“I could not do much for the lady's relief,” the other said, deprecatingly. “I trust she has quite recovered.”

“She is much better, thank you,” replied the banker. “What do you think of her sudden attack, Dr. Raymond? I hope it is not an indication of weak heart.”

“I am not able to speak positively in regard to the lady's condition, as I have not given her a careful examination. I trust, however, and am inclined to think, that her fainting attack was due to some trivial cause,” the physician said.

“Thank you,” responded Mr. Gilbert, relieved at the hopeful view Dr. Raymond was disposed to take of the case.

Mr. Gilbert drew a card from his pocket with his office address upon it as he spoke, and presenting it to the physician, said :

"I trust you will find it convenient to call upon me during your stay in the city."

"Thank you," the young stranger replied. "I should take pleasure in doing so, but I shall return to New York to-morrow."

"Well, I hope I may see you again, at any rate," the kind-hearted banker replied, as he shook hands with his new acquaintance and bade him good-bye."

He hastened away and joined his wife and Mrs. Dunham.

Mrs. Gilbert had been very nervous during his brief return to the fort, and as he reached the side of the carriage Mrs. Dunham said anxiously:

"Mrs. Gilbert's hands are very hot, and her eyes look unnatural. I fear she is threatened with fever."

The lady removed to the opposite seat as she spoke, and Mr. Gilbert gave the order to be driven home; then taking his place beside his wife, put his arm tenderly around her, and drew her head to his shoulder.

As the carriage passed Palm Cottage, little Herbert, who was playing in the front yard, ran and peeped out through the white bars of the gate at the passing vehicle. No one in the carriage noticed the child except Mrs. Gilbert, and the sight of her innocent boy, from whom she would soon be parted forever, sent a pang through her heart and further blanched her already pale cheeks, until Mrs. Dunham, who had been regarding her friend's face with anxiety, thinking she was again upon the point of swooning, quickly offered her smelling-salts. When the carriage arrived at Myrtle Villa, Mrs. Gilbert was put to bed and Dr. Cadova sent for.

"Nervous prostration," was the old physician's verdict. "Rest and perfect quiet for a few days, with something to strengthen the nervous system, will set her all right again," He said cheerfully.

So Leah was doomed to a darkened room and shut away from the presence of all except her physician, nurse, and attentive husband. Even Martha Moore was denied admittance to the sick-room.

"Dr. Cadova, would it do Mrs. Gilbert any harm, to see her babe for a few minutes each day?" Mr. Gilbert inquired of the physician, whom he had intercepted in the hall on his way out after making his usual morning call several days after Mrs. Gilbert's prostration.

Dr. Cadova considered the question a moment and said :

"I think it is best not to permit the child to be brought into the room for a few days yet, at least. Has Mrs. Gilbert requested its presence?"

"No," returned the banker. "In her sleep, however, she often mutters uneasily something about the babe. This morning she started up from a deep sleep, crying imploringly. Have mercy, and do not take my child from me!" She trembled as if she were about to fall into a convulsion. When I assured her that her babe was safe with its nurse, in the nursery, she tried to calm herself, but fell into a fit of bitter weeping, which distressed me very much to witness, and made me think that her mind was not at rest in regard to the child's well-being."

"She is very weak, and the least excitement might bring on a return of fever. So, unless she requests it,

do not bring the child into the room," replied the physician.

It was three weeks after Mrs. Gilbert's fainting fit on the parapet of Fort Marion before Martha Moore was admitted to the lady's sick-room. She was now able to sit up, but Martha found her pale and exhausted from her recent illness.

"Theresa, you may go for a walk while Miss Moore is with me. You are looking quite pale from your long confinement in the sick-room," the banker's wife said kindly to her maid after Miss Moore was seated.

"Thank you, Madam," and the maid hastened away, glad to escape into the bright sunshine and fresh air. Miss Moore followed the maid to the door and locked it after her.

"Oh, Martha, come close to my side, and tell me of my boy," Leah cried in smothered tones of anxiety, as the sound of the maid's footsteps died away.

"Martha drew Leah's head tenderly to her bosom, as her hot tears splashed down on the sunny hair.

"Can you bear the heart-breaking news I have to tell you? Herbert Raymond has taken our baby away with him."

With a smothered cry of agony, the young mother buried her face in her hands and rocked her body to and fro in anguish.

"My heart is broken, and my life's happiness forever wrecked. Oh, Martha; had I taken your advice, I should have been spared this wretched fate. How can I live and know that my blessed boy still lives, and I, his mother, have no part in his life?"

She took her hands from her bloodless face and wrung

them together in despair, as she looked into the distressed face of her confidante.

"My darling," the woman said, with a hopeless attempt at consolation, "perhaps it is best that the child has been taken out of your life. As the circumstances are, you could never have made yourself known to him as his mother, I could give no explanation of his parentage, and an undue fondness for him on your part would in time have surely excited suspicion in Mr. Gilbert's mind, and perhaps in the minds of others. Let the knowledge that the child's interests are in good hands, and that his father is able and willing to give him every advantage that wealth can command comfort you in your separation from him."

"My son will never know his mother," wailed Leah, desolately.

"Neither would he, had he remained unclaimed by his father," Martha answered.

"Oh, that I had remained true to my convictions of right, and never yielded to the temptations that beset me! How can I continue to smile and pretend to be happy, when my heart is broken?" and the conscience-stricken young mother burst into a flood of tears.

Never once did Martha say, "Had you been patient, and heeded my advice, you would have escaped this awful sorrow." She only wiped Leah's tears away, and sought to console and strengthen the suffering woman.

"You will give up Palm Cottage and come and make your home with me always, dear Martha?" Leah pleaded at length.

"I shall give up Palm Cottage," Martha answered in a broken tone, because I can endure life there no longer, since I have been deprived of my nursling, whose presence made the only sunbeam in my life. But, Leah,—forgive me, child, I *must* say it—neither can I come to reside at Myrtle Villa for the daily sight of my face would keep your wounds open and bleeding. Dr. Raymond gave me seven thousand dollars upon the eve of his departure with little Herbert, and his generosity has placed me above want. If you will give your consent, I will return to our old western home, so long closed and deserted; there, within its peaceful, cloister-like walls I shall find rest for my declining years."

"How can I give you up, Martha?" cried Leah. "Every vestige of my past life, up to the time I came to this city will disappear with you, except the ever-lingering shadow cast upon my pathway by my own misdeeds."

"It is better that I should go, darling, and in time the shadow, too, will flee," Martha said soothingly.

Thus the life-lines of the two women, which had so long run parallel diverged for many years.

Shortly after Martha left the room, Mr. Gilbert came in leading little Ruth, whose eyes were red and swollen from weeping. When the child caught sight of her young stepmother, whom she loved with childish devotion, she rushed to her side, and between her sobs said pit-eously:

"Oh, mamma, a man came and took my Herbie away on the big steamer, and he will never bring him back."

Mrs. Gilbert took the little girl in her loving arms, and did

not speak, only hid her own distressed face, against the child's dark curls.

"It is really too bad," Mr. Gilbert said ruefully, "that Ruth had to lose her dearly-loved playmate. "He was such a fine little fellow. I am very sorry that he was taken away. You know his father came for him, do you not, Leah?"

"Miss Moore told me so this morning. I was very sorry to hear the news, for I was deeply attached to the child." And Leah's tears burst forth and mingled with the grieved little girl's, who was nestling in her arms.

"I know you were, dearest, and I knew that his departure would cause you almost, if not quite, as much pain as it did Ruth. Did Miss Moore tell you who little Herbie's father was? If not, you have yet to hear the strange part of the story."

She looked at him with inquiring eyes wet with tears, but answered not a word, and the banker continued :

"It seems that a female relative of the child's had placed it in Miss Moore's charge to be kept until called for. The night that the little fellow was so sick, you remember, Miss Moore, who was searching for a doctor, accidentally ran upon Dr. Raymond, who had that day arrived in St. Augustine to claim his child. He went with the frightened woman to Palm Cottage, but did not discover until the next day that the sick child was his own son. Quite a little romance, was it not, my dear?"

"Quite," Leah answered with dry lips.

"I like Dr. Raymond's appearance very much, and wish

that we could have had the opportunity of cultivating his acquaintance further," remarked the banker.

"I hate him," said Ruth from her mother's protecting arms, "hate him with all my might, for taking my Herbie away."

Mr. Gilbert laughed, and then said reprovingly :

"Hate is a very naughty word for a little girl to use, Ruth. Of course, Herbie's papa wanted his little child just as much as your papa wants you and your baby sister. Now run downstairs and ask Dicey to take you for a walk."

The child sighed deeply, dried her tears, and kissing her stepmother, left the room.

"Poor little thing !" Mrs. Gilbert said, as the door closed on Ruth's retreating form.

"Yes, she feels badly now, but she will soon forget her sorrow. Children's grief is very easily assuaged," he said as he sat down and changed the conversation into another channel.

CHAPTER XXVII.

LIFE in St. Augustine, it seems to me, could never be dull and uninteresting to any one, and I know that the years which elapsed between the incidents related in the last chapter of this book and the present one were filled with interesting events for Mr. Gilbert, his charming wife, and beautiful daughters.

Nevertheless, feeling that I have claimed my reader's attention already too long, I shall turn the pages of these years with a hurried hand, not pausing to give one glimpse of the smiles and tears, joy and sorrow, which marked their passage, until the curtain rises again upon my characters nineteen years later. During this period a wonderful transformation had come over the "ancient city by the sea." Many of its narrow streets, with their foreign names, and houses built of coquina, with overhanging balconies and high garden walls, through which could be caught glimpses of the tropical luxuriance of the grounds and garden beyond, had disappeared. The natural beauty of the spot where Florida was first sighted by that redoubtable knight, Ponce de Leon, whose romantic search for the fabled Fountain of Youth made his name typical of the adventurous and chim-

erical spirit of the age in which he lived, had at last found worthy recognition.

A wealthy capitalist of New York, sojourning a few weeks in St. Augustine, saw at a glance the possibilities of the place and happily resolved to make them good. This noble gentleman, with the splendid foresight and good taste which characterize all his movements in business, as well as social life, proceeded to improve and beautify the "ancient city," and at the same time preserve its antique appearance.

Among other vast improvements, he erected, amid groves of orange, lemon, mulberry, magnolias, myrtle, and palmettos, a lofty castle commemorative of the genius and art of the Spanish race.

With rare magnanimity the proprietor and builder of this wonderful castle, the construction and adornment of which is a perfect dream of grandeur, threw its doors open to the public as a hotel. Thousands and thousands of wealthy tourists, who formerly remained away from St. Augustine in consequence of their inability to secure hotel accommodations commensurate with their wealth and habits, now turned their faces towards the picturesque and historic town. Finding themselves supplied with all that wealth could command, they spent weeks reveling in the almost tropical winters, and in the rare beauties of nature and art so generously spread out for their delectation.

It is not surprising, then, that among the names registered at the "Spanish Castle" should appear two with whom we have already become well acquainted in the history of these pages—*i. e.*, Herbert Raymond, M.D., and Herbert Ray-

mond, Jr. True, the latter has grown from babyhood to manhood since we last saw him ; still one who had seen and known the bright, winsome child, would not have been disappointed in the tall, noble-looking youth who had taken the place of the child of nineteen years previous. He had finished his collegiate course, and the boy's record at college had been a matter of great pride to his idolizing father. Then the two had started off on a rambling journey through the west. When the cold snows of winter descended upon the western plains, quite naturally the hearts of the travelers turned longingly toward a more congenial clime, and a few days later witnessed their names registered at the "Spanish Castle," in the ancient city.

It seems strange that a person who has suffered from some great loss or misfortune, and who had fled from the scene of his sorrow, where everything animate and inanimate reminded him of the fiery furnace of affliction through which he had passed, will, sometimes in after years, when the pain of his loss has been soothed, to some extent, by the healing hand of time, be led by an unconquerable desire to revisit those very scenes associated with his sorrow.

Thus it was with Dr. Raymond. For several years a desire to visit the city where Leah resided, had been strong upon him ; and when his son proposed that they join the tide of winter tourists flowing southward, he gave a ready assent.

Fulfilling a promise made to Miss Moore upon parting, he had written to her at least once a year to tell her of the welfare of her nursling, to whom she was fondly attached. These letters always elicited a reply from the good owman,

who was now, after the harassing trials through which she had passed, living a life of quiet ease at the old Mansden residence in the west. Just before starting for the south, Dr. Raymond had visited her with his young son, and Martha's delight at once more meeting her foster-child, and her pride at his noble and intellectual appearance, knew no bounds. As soon as the young man had retired for the night, and Dr. Raymond and Miss Moore were left alone in the parlor, he inquired eagerly for news of Leah.

To learn that the woman, his love for whom had been the ruling passion of his lonely life, was prosperous and apparently happy, sent a wave of thankfulness over his unselfish soul.

Then a mighty longing took possession of him to see her face once more, even though he might be denied the joy of exchanging one word with the idol of his youth.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

It might have been a scene from "Vanity Fair." The grand parlor at the "Spanish Castle" was a blaze of light. The walls and decorations of ivory-white and gold, with cupids and garlands and gauzy drapery amid the rosy clouds in the ceiling; the rich furnishing of the elegant apartment; the carved mantel, with its clock of transparent Mexican onyx; the rare paintings from the hands of old masters;—all formed an elegant and worthy setting for the gay assemblage, costumed in the very height of fashion, with diamonds and other precious stones flashing and scintillating, gathered there to celebrate some great event in Spanish-American history.

Dr. Raymond, attracted by the sounds of revelry in the magnificent apartment, paused on his way from the dining-hall to the street, where he was going for his evening stroll. Seeing his son among the happy throng, he entered, and picking his way, took a seat in one of the cozy nooks, of which the parlor has many, and there, wrapped in his own thoughts, contemplated the beautiful scene. It was three weeks since he and his son arrived in St. Augustine, and as yet he had caught no glimpse of the dear face enshrined

in his memory, although he had eagerly scanned the face of every lady he met who might be near Leah's age, or in the least resemble her in form, in the prayerful hope of a chance meeting with his lost love.

Two young ladies, all pink and white, with their pretty faces flushed with pleasure, and their eyes vying in brightness with the diamonds on the necks and arms of their fashionable mammas, fluttered up and paused near by where Dr. Raymond sat.

"What a lovely time we are having," exclaimed one. "I wonder why Ruth and Esther Gilbert don't come?"

"Perhaps they are not coming," returned her companion; "although Esther told me this morning that they intended to come. Oh! there they come now;" and the two beauties started towards a party of four who were just entering the saloon.

The group was composed of a lady of delicate appearance, dressed in cream satin ornamented with gauzy lace, with diamonds sparkling on her arms and neck, leaning upon the arm of a noble-looking gentleman whose dark hair was plentifully sprinkled with silver threads. Close behind the couple came two young girls in fairy gossamer-like garments that floated about their graceful forms like summer clouds above a Florida sunset.

Dr. Raymond sprang to his feet, while the hot blood rushed for a moment in a blinding wave from his heart to his brain; then, weak from emotion, he leaned against a massive column, and watched the little group as it broke up and scattered through the room.

"There are the Gilberts. I did not know they had returned from Cuba," spoke one matron to another within his hearing.

"Yes, they came home yesterday, after having been absent five or six weeks."

"Don't you think Mrs. Gilbert a very handsome woman?" replied the other.

"Very; but did you never notice what a sad, yearning expression her eyes have when her features are in repose?" asked the first speaker.

"Yes, I have frequently remarked upon it, and wondered why it is; for, of all women in the world, it seems to me, Mrs. George Gilbert has the least cause for sadness."

"One cannot always tell," replied the first speaker. "I suppose every heart knows its own bitterness, and there is an old adage which tells us that there is a skeleton in every household, no matter how securely it may be hidden from the eyes of the outside world. But let us go and speak to her, and welcome her home after her long absence;" and the two ladies, all unconscious that every word of their light conversation had been eagerly listened to by the tall, handsome stranger leaning wearily against the marble column near where they were standing, rustled away and joined the gay throng.

The matter, which had caused Dr. Raymond no little anxiety since his arrival in the city, was now explained. Mrs. Gilbert had been absent from home, and this was the cause of his not having met her sooner. He stood half hidden by the massive column, with his eyes riveted upon the loved

face. She had changed somewhat. Beautiful young womanhood had given place to the richer, riper fullness of mature years ; but within the depths of the large violet eyes he noted, with a pang at his heart, a pathetic shadow of sorrow that was not there in the old sweet days when she was his wedded love.

An overwhelming desire took possession of his soul to speak to her : would he dare make the attempt ? True, not one in the fashionable assemblage knew him, except it should be Mr. Gilbert, who was now nowhere to be seen in the room. But might not his sudden appearance before Leah cause her to betray her emotions in such a manner as to excite remark and inquiry among her friends ?

Just then a beautiful voice was raised in song to the accompaniment of the grand piano, which stood in a shaded recess, and the company strolled away in the direction of the sweet sounds.

Mrs. Gilbert did not follow the others, but sat down, half wearily and quite alone, and seemed to fall into deep thought. Slowly Dr. Raymond left his hiding-place and approached where she sat. Her eyes were downcast, and she did not notice his near approach until he paused before her ; then Leah raised her eyes, gave one startled look into the eyes bent upon her, and started to her feet.

“Leah,” he said in a whisper, “be careful, do not do anything to attract the attention of others.” And the next moment the woman of the world, who had learned to act a part so well, had controlled her emotions, and was shaking hands with him as though he were some ordinary acquaintance

from her list of friends. "Come with to me the conservatory," he said in a low voice, as he raised his head after bowing before her. "I have much to say to you."

Mechanically she placed her hand on his arm, and they started towards the door. In the doorway they met a young gentleman of her acquaintance just entering the room. She greeted him politely, and after introducing her companion, said :

"Mr. Chalmers, if you should happen to see Mr. Gilbert, or my daughters, will you please tell them that I have gone to the conservatory with a friend?"

"Certainly, madam," the young man replied, bowing.

"Thank you," the lady answered, and the couple passed him, crossed the wide hall, and ascended the grand stairway to the floor above. When they reached the beautiful conservatory—the beauty of which is beyond the power of tongue or pen to describe—they entered through the softly shaded light, and sweet fragrance shed from rare flowers and shrubs growing luxuriantly within, and found a seat completely screened from view by a perfect wall of green leaves and bright-hued flowers. Then, and not until then, did Mrs. Gilbert trust herself to speak, and turning her white face upon her companion, said in a whisper :

"Oh, Herbert, tell me of my son!"

"He is here, Leah; in the very room we have just vacated," he replied in the same low tone.

"Take me to him. I must see him at once!" she cried, half starting to her feet with the exclamation.

"Hush, Leah! and be calm, I beg of you," he entreated,

as he caught her hand in a restraining manner, and gently forcing her back into her seat, continued: "You shall soon see your son, but not until you have calmed yourself—remember that you must meet him only as a stranger."

She covered her face with her hands, and smothered back the cry that almost escaped her lips.

Her companion sat silent for a few moments, regarding her bowed head with a world of love and pity shining in his eyes. At length he gently drew her hands away from her troubled face; and when he saw the traces which sorrow and remorse had left there, a mist came over his eyes, and for a moment obscured the dear face from his vision. Then he talked to her in a low soothing voice, trying to comfort her with the assurance of his forgiveness; even trying, in the nobleness of his manly heart, to convince her that she had not really been to blame for the sorrow that had fallen to her and his lot to bear.

Then he told her of her son; spoke of his manly character, and of his success at college; told her of the great comfort the boy had been to him through all these years which marked her separation from him.

"But for the blessing the boy has been to me, Leah, I do not know how I could have endured life, bereft as I was of you," he said feelingly.

"What explanation did you give to your friends for your son's existence?" she asked at length.

"When I told you at Palm Cottage of the years of vain searching for you, my d——"

He checked himself suddenly, crushing back the word

of endearment which he was about to utter, and continued :

“ My friends always thought that my lost wife, for whom I was spending years of search, was only a myth that had sprung up in my disordered brain, as a result of the severe injury it had sustained in the unfortunate accident which befell me. When I returned home after a brief sojourn south bringing the flaxen-haired, blue-eyed boy with me, and presenting him to my friends as my child and that of my lost wife, they smiled significantly into each other's eyes, petted the boy, and humored me in what they thought my monomania, but did not question me as to how I had come into possession of the child. I doubt not that for years they would not have been surprised to have learned that the boy was one whom my insane freak had led me to abduct.”

While this conversation had been carried on in whispers. other couples flitted in and out of the grand conservatory, or paused to rest a few moments on soft seats under the leafy archways, while they breathed the sweet fragrance of the flowers, and listened to the distant strains which came floating up from the orchestra, mingling with the music of water falling from fountains into the marble basins beneath. But no one intruded behind the green screen where, all unobserved, Dr. Raymond and the banker's wife sat absorbed, discussing a subject so dear to the heart of each.

CHAPTER XXIX.

SUDDENLY a voice reached their ears which brought them quickly to their feet, while every vestige of color forsook Mrs. Gilbert's cheeks. It was the voice of Mr. Gilbert, saying :

"Mrs. Weldon, have you seen Mrs. Gilbert in the conservatory this evening? Mr. Chalmers told me that she had come here to rest."

"I have not seen her, Mr. Gilbert," replied the lady addressed, "although she may be here; I have been sitting ever since I came in. Perhaps she is in 'Lovers' Bower.' If so, I advise you to find her at once, for that is a dangerously romantic place."

The banker and Mrs. Weldon, who were old friends, laughed together over the lady's jesting words. As Dr. Raymond and Mrs. Gilbert started to leave their place of concealment, the former whispered impressively :

"*Gardez, Leah,*" and a moment later they stood face to face with Mr. Gilbert under the soft white light.

"Ah, here you are, truant!" the husband exclaimed, as his eyes fell upon her. Then he stopped short as he noticed the stranger by her side.

"Whom do you suppose I have met?" she said lightly,

trying with all the strength of will-power she possessed to speak without a tremor in her voice.

“An old friend, perhaps,” he answered, smiling back at her.

“I must claim him as such,” she said, “for the one to whom I refer is our little Herbert’s father, and the child was such a favorite of ours. Should you have recognized Dr. Raymond?” and she looked from Mr. Gilbert’s puzzled face into that of the tall stranger by her side.

“Dr. Raymond?” Mr. Gilbert said in rather a bewildered tone. “No—yes—why, is it possible!” and he extended his hand and clasped Dr. Raymond’s in friendly greeting. “No, I do not think I should have recognized Dr. Raymond; but then my acquaintance with him was slight. I am pleased to welcome him back to our city, and to have an opportunity to inquire of him in regard to his child, to whom we were so much attached.”

Dr. Raymond bowed his thanks.

“The child has grown to man’s estate, Mr. Gilbert.”

“Of course,” replied Mr. Gilbert reflectively. “How long has it been since you took him away from Palm Cottage?”

“Nineteen years,” answered Dr. Raymond.

“Nineteen years! Why, then, the boy is twenty-three. Ah! those children, doctor, how quickly they grow to maturity, and how their added growth of years serves to remind their parents of the many milestones those parents have passed on the road of life. But where is little ‘Herbie,’ as we used to call him?”

“I left him in the drawing-rooms below,” Dr. Raymond

answered; "and if Mrs. Gilbert and yourself will kindly accompany me thither, I shall take great pleasure in presenting my son to you, or," he continued upon second thought, "if the lady and yourself will remain here, I will bring him to you."

Both gentlemen looked toward the lady for her to decide the question, and she answered :

"I should prefer to remain here and await his coming."

"Very well, madam, I shall be back in a few moments, and bring my son with me, if I am able to find him."

Dr. Raymond bowed and left the room, bent on his errand.

"Get us a secluded seat," Mrs. Gilbert said to her husband, as soon as they were alone.

"How pale you are, Leah," the banker remarked after they were seated. "Do you not feel well?"

"I think it is the perfume of the flowers; to feel faint when I inhale too much of their sweet fragrance, is an idiosyncrasy of mine, you know," replied the lady, smiling faintly.

"Perhaps, after all, we had best descend to the parlor," he said, with concern in his voice.

"Oh, no, thank you, she answered quickly, for of all things she feared to meet her son in the full glare of the parlor lights, and before so many guests. "I shall feel better presently. I want to overcome this weakness if possible. Is it not beautiful up here?" and they fell to discussing the conservatory, with its growth of rare tropical plants, its vines, and beautiful flowers, and remarked upon the exquisite taste shown in their arrangement.

By and by—it was not long, twenty minutes, perhaps, after Dr. Raymond had left them—the merry voices of a group entering the conservatory fell upon the ears of Mr. and Mrs. Gilbert, and soon Dr. Raymond, with Ruth Gilbert leaning on his arm, stood before them.

The couple were followed by a tall handsome young man, dressed with exquisite taste, and whose refined, and pleasing manners denoted the true gentleman. By his side, with the tips of her fingers resting shyly upon his arm, came the *petite* form of Esther Gilbert.

“Mamma,” exclaimed Ruth, “isn’t this a delightful surprise? Our ‘little Herbie’ has returned after all these years of absence!”

“He is anything but ‘little’ now,” laughed Dr. Raymond, as he drew his son forward and introduced him to Mr. and Mrs. Gilbert.

The tears, which, all unnoticed by the others, sprang into Mrs. Gilbert’s eyes as she placed her cold hand in that of her son, were all that saved her from fainting with the excessive and conflicting emotions which surged through her heart. Her first-born!—her beloved and only son! Oh, cruel fate! that would not permit her to lay her arms about his neck and welcome him back with loving kisses, after all these years of separation.

“Why, upon my word, Dr. Raymond!” exclaimed Mr. Gilbert, after eying the young man’s features a moment critically, “your son still resembles my wife.”

Dr. Raymond, taken by surprise as he was by the banker’s words, started as though the point of a sharp dagger had been

suddenly thrust into his tender flesh. He felt the blood leaving his face, and for a moment almost lost his cool self-possession. But fear for Leah's sake helped him to quickly recover his self-control so that he was able to answer Mr. Gilbert's next remark in a manner that excited no surprise in the eyes of any one of the party, except Mrs. Gilbert, who felt at that moment as though her good name, her future happiness, and even her life, depended upon Dr. Raymond's coolness.

"I often remarked to my wife, when Herbert was a small boy, that he resembled her quite enough to be her brother," continued Mr. Gilbert. "Now that the two are together, can you not detect the resemblance?"

Dr. Raymond gazed for a moment into Leah's eyes, which looked up into his face with an unspoken prayer in their depths, unnoticed by all save himself, and then glancing from them into the face of his smiling son, said :

"Since you have called my attention to it, I believe I do detect a slight resemblance between the two ; not more, however, than is usually noted between persons of the same temperament. For instance, Miss Esther has the same shade of hair and eyes, with something of the same cast of features as my son, and I think the resemblance between the young lady and himself is even more noticeable than it is between Mrs. Gilbert and him. A chance resemblance between strangers is not, by any means, an unusual occurrence."

"I am highly flattered indeed," exclaimed the young man, "when I hear it asserted that I in the least degree resemble Mrs. Gilbert and her charming daughter. I fear, however,



“A chance resemblance between strangers is not by any means an unusual occurrence.”

that what appears in my eyes as a great compliment to my features may be considered by the ladies as anything but a compliment to theirs."

Ruth made some laughing reply, and the subject of conversation, being skillfully turned at this moment by Dr. Raymond, drifted into other topics.

Mrs. Gilbert had been so frightened while the light conversation was carried on, that her limbs shook, and the pulsations of her heart sounded so loudly in her ears, that she feared they would become audible to Mr. Gilbert, who was standing very near her side.

She did not join in the conversation; but after Dr. Raymond had changed it into a safer channel, sat down wearily, and furtively watched her son's features as he stood talking to Esther, who listened to his words with her face all aglow with animation.

At length Ruth, noticing her stepmother's abstracted manner and pale face, said:

"Mamma looks tired, papa. Had we not better go home?"

Mr. Gilbert, who had been holding what to him was an interesting conversation with Dr. Raymond in regard to the vast improvements which had been made in St. Augustine since the doctor's last visit, came back to a realization of his present surroundings, and said, with self-reproach:

"How thoughtless of me to permit your mother to remain so long in the conservatory when I know the fragrance of the flowers always affects her unpleasantly. See how very pale she is!" and going to Mrs. Gilbert's side, he proposed that

they should return home at once. He offered her his arm, and led the way from the conservatory, while the others followed in the order in which they came. Dr. Raymond and his son, accompanied their new-found friends to their carriage when they were ready to depart, and, with the understanding that Mr. Gilbert would call upon the two gentlemen the next day, they assisted the young ladies to their places beside their mother, bade them good-night, and watched the carriage roll away through the bright moonlight, over the smoothly-paved street, toward Myrtle Villa.

CHAPTER XXX.

TRUE to his promise, the banker called upon Dr. Raymond and his son at their hotel the next day. He, in return, gave the two gentlemen a pressing invitation to visit Myrtle Villa and become better acquainted with Mrs. Gilbert and her daughters.

Young Raymond did not let many days elapse before he availed himself of Mr. Gilbert's kind invitation. He could not, however, prevail upon his father to accompany him, although he used every argument possible to induce him to do so. When he arrived at the villa he sent his card to the ladies, who, the servant informed him, were at home, and sat down in the elegantly furnished parlor to wait their coming. In a few moments Mrs. Gilbert made her appearance and welcomed him warmly, and the young man's heart was irresistibly drawn toward the charming lady in a manner never experienced by him before in any lady's company. He spent a delightful hour with her and her fair daughters.

In the afternoon as he sat alone with his father in their private parlor at the "Spanish Castle," he told him of his visit to Myrtle Villa, and how charmed he had been with his hostess, her beautiful daughters, and their elegant home.

"Mrs. Gilbert does not seem as a stranger to me," he said; "I am sure I have often seen her face in my dreams. I believe she is my ideal of what a mother should be;" and the boy sighed as he thought that the greatest blessing on earth had been denied him—that of a mother's love.

"Southern women are very warm-hearted and hospitable as a rule," Dr. Raymond replied. "I suppose the fact of Mrs. Gilbert having known and loved you in your infancy made her even kinder to you than if you had been an entire stranger. Do you not remember her in the least?" and Dr. Raymond, as he put the question, scanned his son's face narrowly.

"Miss Ruth Gilbert asked me the same question this morning," Herbert replied. "She insists that she remembers me. If this be so, as I am one year her senior, I ought to remember the young lady and her mother. If I have any recollection of them, however, it is very, very vague, and seems to me more like the broken fragments of a pleasant but almost forgotten dream than a reality."

"You were too young when I took you from Palm Cottage to have anything but a very indistinct remembrance of that period in your life," his father answered, as he resumed his reading.

The young man took up his hat to leave the room.

"By the way, father," he paused to say, with his hand on the door-knob, "we are invited to the villa to tea this evening at five o'clock."

"Did Mrs. or Mr. Gilbert invite us?" Dr. Raymond asked, without looking up from the pages of his book.

"Mrs. Gilbert gave the invitation," was the reply.

"Are you sure that I was included in the invitation?" Dr. Raymond asked.

Herbert laughed.

"You must have the gift of second-sight, father," he said, "and I may as well confess that at first she did not include you in the invitation. The lady did not seem to notice the omission until both her daughters supplemented: 'And be sure to bring Dr. Raymond with you, Mr. Raymond.' Mrs. Gilbert colored slightly, at having made the oversight, I suppose, and said: 'Certainly.'"

Dr. Raymond flushed slightly under his son's steady gaze, and asked:

"Do you intend to accept the invitation?"

"I had thought of so doing. You will accompany me, will you not?" young Raymond replied.

"I have an engagement at that hour which will prevent my so doing," Dr. Raymond answered. "So you will please convey my regards and regrets to the ladies at Myrtle Villa."

"I am very sorry you cannot go. I am desirous to have you become better acquainted with the family, and especially with Mrs. Gilbert, whom I think the most interesting lady I have ever met."

With these words Herbert passed out, and closed the door. Had he turned suddenly back, however, the spectacle there witnessed would have caused his eyes to open wide in amazement.

Dr. Raymond had dropped the book from which he had been reading, and it lay half open on the carpet at his feet,

while the hands which had held it, were clenched together until the nails almost drew blood from the tender palms. His face was very pale, his lips firmly closed, and his eyes shone with a rebellious light, as though he fain would, with his puny human strength, battle down the insurmountable barrier which fate, with cruel caprice, had erected between himself and happiness.

The first evening spent by Herbert at Myrtle Villa, was the beginning of an intimate friendship between the banker's interesting family and the young man; and soon scarcely a day passed that did not see him at the villa, or walking or driving with Mrs. Gilbert, and one or both of her fair daughters.

So the glorious winter months in this semi-tropical climate sped swiftly away. After the first meeting of Mrs. Gilbert and Dr. Raymond at the "Spanish Castle," the two did not meet again except at church, or upon the street, and no conversation had taken place between them.

It puzzled Herbert to understand why his father could never be induced to visit Myrtle Villa, and it was a matter of regret to him also that he should so persistently decline to cultivate the acquaintance of the Gilberts.

"I know that you do not care for society in the general acceptation of the term, but I think you might make an exception in this case for my sake, at least," the young man said, when discussing a ball which was to be given at the villa, and the last one of the season.

"Do not urge me to go, my son," he replied. "I never cared to attend balls in my youth, and I am too old to culti-





“A man and woman with heads bent close together.”—Page 205.

vate a taste for them now," and taking up his hat and cane, he sallied forth for one of the long solitary walks in which he daily indulged.

This afternoon he wandered far beyond the ancient city gates, and continued his lonely walk until the lengthening evening shadows warned him that the day was drawing speedily to a close. When he reached the sea-wall on his return the sun had set, and the shadowy twilight was melting into the silvery radiance of the full moon's tender light, turning the picture of the old fort, the bay with its sail-boats and fishing-smacks lying at anchor, the ancient sea-wall, the stately trees lining the streets, and the lights twinkling from the city, all into a scene worthy the brush of a renowned artist.

As the man, with head bent in thought, continued his homeward way, a silvery laugh coming, it must have been, from the happy heart of a young girl, fell upon his ears and caused him to quickly raise his head. A man and woman with heads bent close together, one might think in lovers' fashion, were walking a short distance before him on the sea-wall. Something familiar in the man's appearance caused Dr. Raymond to quicken his footsteps, and soon he stood behind the pair, whose lagging gait proved plainly that they were in no haste to reach the termination of their pleasant walk.

Hearing footsteps approaching from behind, the girl glanced quickly—apprehensively the doctor thought—over her shoulder, and recognizing Dr. Raymond, stopped short in her walk, saying:

"Here is your father, Herb—Mr. Raymond." She had evidently almost addressed her companion by his given name, but checking herself in time, substituted his surname, and stood smiling and blushing as Dr. Raymond advanced and held his hand out toward her, saying:

"Good-evening, Miss Gilbert; I thought I recognized you and my son by the light of the moon."

"We did not hear you coming until this moment, or we should have waited for you," Herbert said, flushing slightly. "Have you been walking near behind us all the way from the fort?" and his father thought the young man put the question a little anxiously.

"No, not very near, for I did not notice any one on the sea-wall until just before I came up with you. I trust you are having a pleasant stroll."

"Delightful, thank you," replied the young lady. "Will you not join us, Dr. Raymond?"

"I fear my somber presence would spoil the romance of this beautiful scene, Miss Esther," he said, laughing.

"Oh, no, indeed," she replied, laughing and blushing, and then said naively: "We are on our way home and are due there already," glancing in the bright moonlight at the tiny watch she had drawn from her belt as she spoke. "I will be delighted to have you accompany us, and remain to tea; it would be a pleasant surprise to papa and mamma."

"I regret that my engagements are such that I shall have to forego the pleasure that would be afforded me by an acceptance of your kind invitation. Permit me to thank you

for your kindness, and ask you to present my compliments to your parents and sister."

He shook hands with her again with old-time courtesy, and turning to his son, asked :

"What time shall you be at the hotel to-night, Herbert?"

"About eleven o'clock, sir," the young man replied.

"I shall probably be reading as late as that hour, and will see you when you come in. Well, *au revoir* ; and Dr. Raymond, being near a pair of stone steps leading from the sea-wall to the street below, descended them and took a short way to his hotel.

This chance meeting with Leah's son and daughter had given him food for harassing conjecture, and made him recognize the possibility of a question arising in the near future the issue of which would lead to Leah's exposure and disgrace.

CHAPTER XXXI.

It was high noon of the day after the ball at Myrtle Villa, which had been the grandest success of the season. Dr. Raymond sat alone in his private parlor at the "Spanish Castle." Some one knocked at his door for admittance ; and when it was opened by the occupant of the room, he saw a bell boy belonging to the hotel, and a small negro boy dressed in the livery of the servants of Myrtle Villa, standing outside.

"This boy has a message for Dr. Raymond," the bell boy said.

"Very well ; what is it ?" answered the gentleman.

"Please, sah, may I come in ?" said the boy mysteriously, as the hotel boy disappeared down the corridor.

"Certainly."

The small boy stepped into the room and closed the door himself.

"Is you Doctah Raymond?" he said, showing all his even white ivories as he spoke.

"I am. What can I do for you," answered the doctor in an amused voice.

"Is you shoah you's alone, Doctah?" further inquired the pickaninny.

"Quite sure. What are you going to do?—rob me?" said the doctor, laughing at the boy's comical appearance.

"No, sah, I wouldn't rob nobody fo' nothin'. My missus has done learned me bettah manners dan dat, sah."

"Glad to hear it," laughed the gentleman! "What do you want with me?"

"If you's shoah—*double shoah* you's all alone by yo'sef, I wants to tell you something."

"Yes, I am all alone by myself," the doctor assured him.

"An' nobody's gwine to heah what I say?" further questioned the boy.

"Nobody," was there assuring reply.

"Well, den, sah, I'se got a note foh you, sah;" and the boy unbuttoned his snug jacket, and taking out a small white envelope, handed it to the gentleman.

Dr. Raymond glanced at the address, and recognized, with a thrill, mingled with pain and pleasure, the handwriting of Leah. Hastily he broke the seal and read.

"I must have a private interview with you at the earliest moment possible, to discuss a matter of the gravest importance to us both. Are you able to suggest a plan by which we may meet without fear of interruption or exciting suspicion? Send answer immediately by the boy who brings you this message."

The note was without address, date, or signature, but none of these were needed to convey to its recipient the fact that the woman for whose welfare and happiness he

was trying bravely to bear his cross was in trouble and sought assistance from him.

"Wait a moment," he said to the messenger, and going to a small inlaid desk which stood in the room, wrote :

"You may see me in my private parlor at my hotel without interruption, or the least fear of exciting suspicion. It is no unusual occurrence for me to have lady-callers who come for the purpose of consulting me professionally. Come to-morrow at 3 P. M. I will instruct my valet to watch for the arrival of your carriage, and he will conduct you to my private apartments, so that you need not have to make inquiries to find me. Have no fears."

This note, without address, date, or signature, as hers had been, he placed in an envelope, and going back to where the boy stood, patiently waiting, said :

"You are to put this note in your jacket pocket, and not let any one see it, or know that you have it. When you deliver it to your mistress, you must do so when no one else will see you. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sah, done 'stood all 'bout it 'foh you tole me, massa, for my Missus Leah done charged me over an' over again what to do, and if anybody see dat note 'ceptin' Mis Leah dey'd have to knock me in the head fust."

"Very well, I will trust you," and the doctor slipped a dollar into the boy's hand, whose eyes sparkled with delight when he saw the shining coin.

Then a thought suddenly occurring to the gentleman, he said cautiously :

"You must not show any one your dollar or tell that I gave you one."

"*No, sah*; my Mis Leah and de young missuses has learned me bettah manners dan to blab; 'sides, I'se too much of a gen'l'man to talk wid white 'buckra' or common niggahs. No, sah, I'll jest slip my dollar into Mis Leah's han' when nobody is lookin', an' she'll put it away till I needs it, sah."

"All right; then be off," and the gentleman opened the door, and the wily little messenger, grinning all over his sleek black face, disappeared like a flash down the long corridor.

Dr. Raymond turned back into the room, and taking the tiny note from his pocket, perused it again and again, until every word it contained was emblazoned on his memory. Leah was in trouble, but from what cause he racked his brain in vain to conjecture.

His reverie was interrupted by Herbert, whom he had not seen that day. After talking a few moments pleasantly with his son, Dr. Raymond said:

"Sit down and tell me about last night's ball."

"Something I should never have dared attempt, sir, without being solicited by you; because I am aware that generally even a brief description of a ball bores my father almost beyond endurance," replied the young man, laughing as he spoke. Then he proceeded to give a graphic description of the entertainment at Myrtle Villa, and wound up by saying: "But to fully understand how well the art of entertaining successfully is understood by the people of the south,

one must attend at least one of these enjoyable occasions."

"Mr. and Mrs. Gilbert entered fully into the young people's spirit of gayety, I suppose," Dr. Raymond remarked casually.

"I thought so in the beginning of the evening, but later on I noticed Mrs. Gilbert looking very pale, almost harassed, I thought, although the lady was unremitting in her attentions to her guests. She was much fatigued, no doubt, and this was the cause of her paleness."

"Misses Ruth and Esther are very charming young ladies," further remarked the elder man.

"Very charming, indeed," was the enthusiastic reply.

"Miss Esther is, I think, however, your favorite of the two," Dr. Raymond said cautiously.

A red flush spread quickly over the young man's somewhat tanned cheeks.

"What leads you to suppose such is the case?" he asked, half-confusedly.

"Various small incidents, chief among which was the very confidential manner in which the young lady and yourself were conversing when I overtook you walking on the seawall last Monday evening," Dr. Raymond answered.

Herbert flushed again, almost painfully, under his father's scrutiny, and said:

"Miss Esther is a very entertaining and amiable young lady, but I think Miss Ruth the more intellectual, as well as the more beautiful of the two."

"Have you an engagement for to-morrow afternoon?"

asked Dr. Raymond, suddenly changing the subject under discussion.

"No, I think not," Herbert began reflectively, and then suddenly remembering what he had for a moment forgotten, corrected his statement. "Oh, yes, I have an engagement to go out with a sailing-party. Will you not go also?"

"What hour do you start?" inquired his father.

"At one o'clock," Herbert replied.

Dr. Raymond drew a sigh of relief. His son would be absent from the hotel when Mrs. Gilbert called, which would prevent a chance meeting between the two, and embarrassing questions which the former might ask of him in regard to the nature of the lady's call.

"I cannot go, Herbert, for I have an appointment to fill at that hour," he said at length.

"I regret that you cannot go, for sailing over those calm southern waters in this delightful weather is very enchanting," the son replied.

"You must not become so enamored of this picturesque place and its surroundings as to forget home, Herbert," his father answered, "because I am thinking seriously of returning to New York next week."

The young man started.

"Next week!" he exclaimed in surprise. "Why go so early? This is only March, and the weather in New York at this season is what the English call 'beastly.'"

"I have business that requires my early attention at home," replied the elder man; "and, besides, we have been here almost five months."

“It does not seem possible that we have been here so long,” Herbert rejoined, and then added earnestly: “I cannot think of leaving yet, for several weeks at least. And I wish that we might be able to make our business arrangements such that we might remain here for the term of our natural lives.”

Dr. Raymond laughed at his son's enthusiasm, and turned to examine the contents of his mail, which had just been delivered by his valet, and the young man took his hat, left the hotel, and directed his footsteps toward Myrtle Villa.

CHAPTER XXXII.

‘I AM going to drive out a short distance into the country this afternoon,’ Dr. Raymond said to his son, as the two left the table after luncheon. ‘If you are going directly to the wharf to meet the sailing party, you may as well go in the carriage with me, as I shall pass very near the place.’

‘Are you going at once?’ Herbert asked.

‘In a few moments,’ his father replied.

‘It is almost an hour before the time set for the sailing, but I can wait the arrival of the others at the dock,’ Herbert returned thoughtfully; and soon the two gentlemen were driving swiftly towards the bay.

‘What time do you suppose you will return?’ Dr. Raymond asked, as his son alighted at the wharf.

‘We do not expect to return before nine o’clock; and if we should be out an hour or two later, you will have no cause for uneasiness for our safety,’ the young man replied.

Dr. Raymond wished the party a pleasant time, bade his son good-afternoon, and drove away.

Herbert, being in no hurry, stood watching the carriage until it disappeared down the shell road, and then walked

leisurely on to the floating dock to await the arrival of his companions. No one as yet had put in an appearance, although the pretty little sailing craft moored to the dock, with her white sails flapping lazily in the soft zephyrs, stood bowing and curtsying on the gentle swell of the waves glinting in the rays of the afternoon sun.

"Hello, Raymond!"

"Good-evening, Foster."

And Herbert stood shaking hands with a well-built, broad-shouldered young man, with a smooth, pleasant face, and large dreamy brown eyes.

"Where are the other boys?" Raymond asked.

"Oh, it is just my deuced luck," returned Foster. "The sail has been postponed until to-morrow afternoon, and I won't manage to go, because I have to go to Jacksonville to-morrow."

"Why was the party postponed?" Herbert inquired.

"On account of the funeral this afternoon of a distant relative of Captain Roylston, which prevented his going, and the boys concluded not to go until to-morrow."

"I don't care for the postponement myself, only if it will deprive us of your company. Can't you put off your trip to Jacksonville until the day following?" Herbert asked.

"Oh, no; I must go to-morrow," the other replied.

"Well, come home with me and spend the afternoon, and I will do my best to entertain you, to make up a little for your disappointment," Herbert continued kindly.

"Just my luck again," growled Foster. "If I could accept your kind invitation, I shouldn't care so much about

being deprived of the sail. I can't do so, however, for I have promised to go driving with Len Masters this afternoon."

So the two young men quitted the dock and sauntered slowly back to town. When they reached the court of the "Spanish Castle" they separated, Foster going to keep his appointment with his friend, while the other entered the hotel and made his way to his father's and his own private apartment.

He let himself into the parlor with his pass-key, and looked about for some way to pass the time until his father's return.

"Wish I had known of the postponement of the sailing party before father went away, and I should have driven with him," he thought, as he sat down in the adjoining smoking-room to enjoy his cigar.

He sat with lazy, half-shut eyes watching the blue rings of smoke as they left his mouth and floated circling and curling about his head.

"I see her dear face in everything," he soliloquized. "It is even framed in the soft curls of smoke, or peeps shyly out at me from every nook in the room. It is the sweet companion of my dreams, wandering with me through enchanted lands, and never, never leaving me in my waking hours. Well, one thing I am determined upon. I shall never leave this city until I have learned my fate from her own dear lips."

He threw the stump of his cigar into the grate, and getting up, sauntered back into the parlor, picked up the New

York daily paper, and throwing himself upon a luxurious lounge screened behind heavy Oriental curtains, began to glance over its contents.

The light in the cozy nook was weak and soft, and the print before his eyes was small; so in a few moments the paper lay unheeded on the rug by his side, while he lay with closed eyes and listless hands clasped across his breast. Ere long the sweet face, which had been the subject of his soliloquy, was brought with a lover's imagination near his own.

The sounds about the great house grew muffled and more indistinct. The clock in the convent not far distant struck the hour of two. The sound of horses' feet passing swiftly through the broad thoroughfare below grew hollow and far away, and then all sounds blended together in delicious music, as he clasped his loved one's hand, and sailed with her airily away into the sweet mystery of dreams.

He was awakened by the sounds of bitter weeping. He rubbed his eyes, thinking that he must still be dreaming, and listened again. A woman's voice, speaking in tones of agony, floated to his listening ears.

"My God, Herbert! what shall I do if my worst fears are verified? I never will face the disgrace of exposure. I will kill myself first!" and the speaker's further utterance was choked by tears and sobs.

"Leah, my love,—you must let me call you so—you may be alarming yourself unnecessarily," said a man's deep voice, which the listener recognized as that of his own father.

He raised himself slowly to a sitting posture, and



“He raised himself slowly in a sitting posture.—Page 218.

cautiously peered through the slight aperture in the curtains. A woman slightly above the medium height, but of slender build, dressed in a heavy black silk, stood with her back towards him, half leaning her head against Dr. Raymond's shoulder, who stood with his arm thrown protectingly around her slender waist. Her silk velvet wrap had slipped off and lay on the carpet at her feet, while one small gloved hand held a handkerchief pressed to her weeping eyes.

She did not answer the man's reassuring words, but continued to sob and catch her breath in gasps.

"Has the boy spoken to you or the girl's father about his love?" Dr. Raymond questioned.

"No, he has not; but we would be blind indeed not to discover it without his spoken confession," was the sobbing answer.

"Let me place you in a chair, Leah; you are weak and trembling," he said with great tenderness.

He half carried her to a large arm-chair, seated her therein, and knelt by her side.

"Try to calm yourself, darling, and we will devise some way out of this difficulty," he said entreatingly.

"Oh, Herbert, for the love of Heaven, do not now use words of endearment to me; I cannot bear to hear them," she cried, taking her handkerchief from her eyes and looking at him reproachfully.

As she raised her head the young man behind the curtains caught a full view of her features.

"Great God! it is Mrs. Gilbert," was his mental exclamation, as he started to his feet in amazement.

He pressed his hand tightly to his mouth to force back the cry which rose involuntarily to his lips, as he made the startling discovery, and sank back upon the lounge, bending his body far forward as he continued to listen with an eager curiosity that was beyond all sense of word, fitness, or his strength of will-power to resist.

"Forgive me, Leah," Dr. Raymond said penitently, "I will try to remember our relative positions, although my heart tells me that it would be no sin for me to take you in my arms and kiss your tears away."

She silenced him with an imploring gesture.

"Will you tell me what to do?" she entreated in despairing tones.

"I will take the boy away," he said. "I told him yesterday that we must shortly return to New York."

"But this will not have the effect to thwart him in his purpose, if he desires to marry the girl," she said despairingly.

"Leah, can you not lay your commands upon your daughter?" he asked, thoughtfully.

"Yes, with the same result that my grandmother's commands had upon me," she said with great bitterness, and then added in a heart-broken tone: "Oh, Herbert, did ever an act of disobedience bear such bitter fruit as mine has borne?"

He took her gloved hand from where it rested on the arm of the chair, and caressed it between his own, pityingly, but made no answer to her question. She had ceased to weep, and looked into his face with despairing eyes as she continued:

"What shall I do? How can I avert this awful deed and not expose my own crime?"

"I will take my son away to-night," he said.

"He may refuse to go," she answered doubtingly.

"He has never disobeyed me in his life, and I do not believe he will disobey me in this," the man said proudly. "I shall win a confession from him, and, if your fears are well-founded, will use my influence against this unfortunate attachment, and induce him to give the girl up."

"Suppose, following the tradition of his parents, he refuses to listen to either your threats or your persuasions, what then?" she asked with white, dry lips.

"Then, Leah, but one way remains open to me, and that is to bind him first by an oath of eternal secrecy, and then confess all to him."

"Oh, my God!" she moaned, covering her face with her hands, and rocking her body to and fro, "what a terrible alternative! to stand branded with the scarlet letter in the eyes of one whose love and respect I crave above all men!"

"Do not despair, Leah," the man said, getting up from his kneeling posture and leaning over her. "Trust all to me, and I will protect your good name, not only in the eyes of the world, but I swear to you, that my son shall hold you blameless."

"God grant that this far greater blessing than I deserve may be vouchsafed me," she said, getting up wearily, and beginning to prepare to leave the room. "I will trust it all to you, Herbert, but remember if you fail, and my disgrace

becomes known to the world, I will fill a suicide's grave. When shall you leave the city ?”

“ At ten o'clock to-night. I will not mention my plans to Herbert until a short time before the hour for leaving ; so if he comes to the villa he will only have time for a brief leave-taking.”

He brought her silken mantle as he spoke, laid it tenderly around her shoulders, and looking imploringly into her sad face said :

“ To-night, Leah, we part, perhaps forever. Will it be any comfort to you to know that every tender recess of my heart has ever been, and ever shall be, kept sacred to the memory of our love ?”

She answered him only with her tears.

He folded her tenderly in his arms, drew her head to his breast, and kissed her lips again and again, reverently, hopelessly, as one kisses for the last time the lips of the beloved dead, ere the coffin-lid shuts the dear face forever from earthly eyes.

“ Good-bye, my beloved,” he murmured. “ God shield and keep you forever from harm, and grant that we may some day meet where partings are unknown, and love mourns no broken ties.”

He drew his own silken handkerchief from his pocket, and dried her tears, comforting and reassuring her the while.

When she had, under the strong magnetism of his touch, grown wondrously calm, he led her to the door, unlocked it for her to pass out, imprinted upon her tender lips a fare-

well kiss, and stood watching her slender figure until she was joined by his own valet, who was watching for her coming in the lofty corridor. Then, with a sigh which seemed to come from a breaking heart, he stepped back into the room, closed and locked the door, and turning around stood face to face with his son.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

HAD the muzzle of a pistol been suddenly thrust into Dr. Raymond's face by the hand of a murderous assassin, he could not have started back with more surprise and horror written on his countenance than was depicted there when his eyes fell upon the pale, reproachful face of his young son.

"How came you here?" the father demanded at length in an angry voice. "You told me you were going with the sailing party."

"The sailing was postponed, and I came back and fell asleep upon the lounge behind the curtains," Herbert answered calmly. "Unwillingly, I was made a spectator to part of the scene between the banker's wife and yourself, and I wish to God my eyes had been closed in death before this unhappy hour, which has forced the awful conviction upon me that there is no virtue in woman and no honor in man. For when the woman whom I considered but little lower than the angels in heaven, has proved no better, nay, not even so good as the courtesan who walks the streets with painted face and flaunting garments; for she, at least, makes no pretensions of virtue, and my own father, upon whose unswerving honor

I should have willingly staked my life, has turned traitor and seduced the wife of his friend, what man or woman in the whole universe shall I ever be able to trust?"

A red wave mounted the doctor's pale face as he listened to this scathing rebuke, dyeing it for a moment with crimson, and then as quickly receding, left him standing pale and abashed before the eyes of his reproachful son. He made no reply, but walked slowly to the arm-chair in which Mrs. Gilbert had sat, and threw himself wearily into its cushioned softness, as though he had neither heart nor strength to plead his cause before his angry judge.

Herbert stood looking down at him a moment from his towering height of six feet, half in pity, half in scorn; then turning quickly away, he snatched up his hat and started towards the door. As his hand was on the knob his father arrested his departure by saying:

"Where are you going, Herbert?"

"I neither know nor care," was the reckless reply.

"Do not leave the room then; come and sit down. I have a bit of history to reveal to you, which, I think, will make you confess that you have maligned a noble, although, in some respects, an unfortunate woman."

Something, very like a sneer curled the young man's lips as he obeyed the request.

"Before I do this, however," his father went on to say, "I want you to answer truthfully the questions I shall ask you. Are you in love with Esther Gilbert, and do you desire her hand in marriage?"

Herbert started to his feet as these questions were put to

him, and the veins stood out on his white forehead in knotted blue lines.

"I am not in love with Esther Gilbert, thank God ! Neither do I desire her hand in marriage. If I were so unfortunate, I would now tear her image from my heart, and cast it from me forever ; for rather than wed the daughter of the woman who has just left this room, I would willingly blow out my brains," the young man answered with angry vehemence.

The look of inexpressible relief that instantly chased the shadows of grief and unrest from the elder man's face, as he heard this declaration was like that which sweeps over the face of a prisoner who, after weary days of trial for his life, at length has the gloomy recesses of his soul illuminated by the joyous words, "Not guilty !"

"Thank God," he breathed devoutly, "that this added sorrow has passed the girl's suffering mother by unscathed."

This devout ejaculation caused the young man to stare at his father's pale face for a moment in dumb astonishment.

"Your words mystify me beyond expression," Herbert said at length.

"They shall soon be made clear to you," his father replied, and getting up he went to his desk and returned with a small pocket Bible in his trembling hand. "Herbert," he said, as he again stood before his son, will you bind yourself by a solemn oath never to disclose the secret that I am about to reveal to you, unless you have Mrs. Gilbert's full and willing consent ?"

The young man hesitated as though some one sought to bind him by an oath to become an accomplice to a crime, and said :

“ Father, this is a most extraordinary request. If you wish me to promise that I will never reveal what my discovery this afternoon leads me to believe—namely, that between Mrs. Gilbert and my father, there has existed, or even now exists, very questionable relations—for your own safety, and for the sake of the shame which a revelation of the disgraceful facts would bring upon innocent parties, I am free to promise that I shall carry the secret to the grave with me.”

“ If you will listen to what I have to tell you, you will discover how unjust and erroneous your conclusions are,” his father answered sadly.

“ I am ready to listen,” he replied briefly.

“ But you have not taken the oath of secrecy,” his father reminded him.

Herbert rose quickly to his feet and said :

“ Neither shall I. I consider my word of honor as binding as an oath.”

“ Then you shall not hear the disclosure,” Dr. Raymond said, half turning away.

The young man reached out quickly, and taking the Holy Bible from his father’s hand said impatiently :

“ Repeat what you would have me say.”

“ I solemnly swear that the secret which my father, Herbert Raymond, is about to divulge to me shall never be revealed by me to any person or persons on earth, unless I first obtain

Mrs. George Gilbert's full and willing consent,' " Dr. Raymond said slowly.

His son repeated the words after him with becoming solemnity, and pressing his lips an instant to the open page of Holy Writ, closed the book, and handed it back to his father.

Dr. Raymond laid the book on the table, and turning to his son, said kindly :

" Sit down ; I shall not detain you long."

Commencing with the first meeting between Leah Mansden and himself, Dr. Raymond gave his astonished son a full recital of the incidents and accidents occurring from that time to the present in the lives of the two, and which are already known to the reader. Long before the close of the pathetic narrative the angry fire in young Raymond's eyes was quenched by tears.

" My own mother ! It seems almost impossible that this can be true," he said with deep emotion.

" Do you wonder at her signs of distress during the interview she had with me to which you were an unseen witness ? " his father asked.

" Indeed, I do not. The circumstances and danger that menaced her were enough to drive her insane. God forgive me for the wrong I momentarily did her ! It seems strange to me, how she or any one could have surmised that I was in love with Esther Gilbert, for nothing was ever more foreign to my thoughts. I love her as a very dear friend, and remember now of often wishing that kind Heaven had blessed me with a sister like herself. But, aside from this, all the

love of my heart was given to Ruth, almost from our first hour of meeting."

"Are both young ladies aware of your feelings toward them, respectively?" his father asked sympathetically.

"They are. Esther is my faithful friend and confidante, and this, I suppose, led others into the very natural mistake of supposing us to be lovers," the young man replied, in rather a hopeless tone. "Ruth, however, is so very shy and reticent, that sometimes I fear I shall never be able to win her affections."

"Do not despair," his father said hopefully. "The young lady is no coquette. She is quiet and undemonstrative by nature, perhaps, but such a woman as that usually has a wealth of affection which blesses the man who is lucky enough to stir its still, deep fountain."

"God grant that I may win her heart!" Herbert replied with much feeling. "I cannot endure to even think upon the dreary waste life will become to me if she rejects my suit."

The two men sat silent for several minutes after Herbert ceased speaking, engrossed in deep thought, and then the young man said:

"You have not told me, father, when I shall be permitted to see the lady I have known as Mrs. Gilbert, and hear the sweet assurance from her own dear lips, that I am, indeed, her son."

"I will make arrangements to have her come here to-morrow, if possible, at the same hour that she came to-day. You may be concealed behind the curtains as you were then.

After I have explained to her the circumstances which led to your possession of the secret, you may join us, and it is very easy for me to imagine how great her joy will be."

"It will scarcely exceed my own," Herbert replied; "for until my unfortunate—or I should say fortunate—witnessing of the interview between the lady and yourself, I had always had the deepest reverence and respect for her, and considered her in every way far superior to any lady I ever met; and now to understand it all, and know that I shall have the proud privilege of calling her by the holy name of mother, fills my heart with a flood of tender joy that is both strange and delicious to experience."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"THE deed has always haunted me as an unnatural and monstrous act for a mother to be guilty of. I cannot understand how you can be noble enough to forgive me for it, my son."

You were the victim of unfortunate circumstances, my mother."

"Say, rather, that I was a victim to my own weak cowardice, that made me shrink from a life of poverty, with its small cares, its harassing privations, and its hours of toiling for daily bread."

"These miseries are enough to appal the heart of the strongest man, much more a weak girl, thrown upon the hard world to fight the battle against poverty alone and unprotected," young Raymond replied, as he kissed his mother's quivering lips and wiped her tears away.

The scene was in the private parlor of Dr. Raymond at the "Spanish Castle," the next day after Herbert Raymond had been made the sharer of his parents' secret, and electrified by the wonderful news that he was the son of the aristocratic banker's wife.

Dr. Raymond had managed to privately summon the lady,

and when she came with fear and trembling for the news he might have to impart, he comforted her with the assurance that all was well, and the mighty fears that had driven her to the verge of madness were groundless.

When her son, obeying a sign from his father, came from his place of concealment, she stood for a moment abashed, trembling and shame-faced before the young man, her own born son, whom she had denied in his infancy.

Then she fell upon her knees at his feet and begged his forgiveness for the wrong she had been guilty of committing against him. The young man raised her gently to her feet and pressed her quivering form tenderly to his heart, assuring her, as he mingled his tears with her own, of his forgiveness and undying love. After she had grown calm, he placed her in a chair, and, kneeling beside her, looked up into the dear face with eyes lighted with filial love and devotion, while his noble father, who had long ago accepted his own lonely fate with a heroism worthy of a martyr of old, sat by, joining in the conversation, and rejoicing that the two beings, whose happiness was with him paramount to every other desire in life, were at last reunited.

"It is a bitter thought to me," Herbert said, "that the mantle of secrecy must still be thrown around my birthright, and that I shall be denied the proud privilege of claiming my mother and half-sister before the world."

"This is part of my just punishment," his mother replied, as her hand caressed his sunny hair, and she looked contritely into the violet eyes, whose color and expression were so like her own that many a stranger had remarked upon the striking likeness between the two. "It seems an unjust law

that often the innocent must suffer with the guilty, but it is so," she added, in deep humiliation of spirit.

"You must cease to reproach yourself, dear mother, or you will render me very unhappy," her son replied, with great earnestness.

Leah's eyes wandered from his handsome young face to the benevolent one of his father, upon which the sorrow and disappointment of his life had left many a telltale mark, and said :

"Our son has inherited my features, but kind Heaven has blessed him with your nobleness of spirit, Herbert."

"My love for you, Leah, has been my guiding star through life," he replied. "If my character is possessed of one tithe of the nobleness with which you so kindly attribute it, the same was developed by my affection for the girl I wooed, won and lost, long years ago."

"Had I been worthy such devotion, how different our lives might have been," she replied sadly, as she rose and began to prepare for her return to Myrtle Villa, before her long absence should excite inquiry. "You will take care to guard my secret well, will you not, my son?" she asked tremblingly, as she stood with both her hands clasped in his. "Not that I deserve to be so kindly shielded from the censure of the world," she added quickly, flushing under her son's steady eyes, "but for the peace of mind of the man whom I deceived, and for the sake of your dear half-sister. Mr. Gilbert's unbounded confidence in my truth and integrity of character has never faltered; and now, at this late day, should he become possessed of my secret, and realize the

enormity of the deception I have practiced all these years, it would drive him to madness."

"Mother, have no fear. Your unhappy secret shall be as well guarded for all time by your son as it has been by yourself and my father in the past."

He folded her in his arms and kissed her lips and cheeks over and over again, as though he could never give her up. When he at last released her and looked about for Dr. Raymond, he was not in the room.

He did not remark upon his father's disappearance, but giving his arm to his mother, led her downstairs, placed her in the waiting carriage, and stood watching the elegant equipage until it disappeared from his view down the street.

Then pulling his hat down over his gloomy brow, the young man turned his back upon the busy thoroughfare, and took himself away to the green, sweet solitude of the woods, on the banks of the St. Sebastian, to ponder over the strange events that had recently occurred in his life.

CHAPTER XXXV.

ONE week later, when Dr. Raymond and his son turned their half-reluctant faces towards their northern home, Herbert Raymond, Jr., with the full consent of the young lady's father, was the betrothed husband of Ruth Gilbert.

"When one thinks of the sweet companionship which existed between the boy and girl in their early childhood, and the grief of little Ruth when she was deprived of his presence, it seems the most natural thing in the world that the two should become lovers in their maturer years, and later on husband and wife;" Mr. Gilbert said to his wife, when the love-affair between the two young people was being discussed by the two in their private apartment.

"Nothing could give me more pleasure than their betrothal," Mrs. Gilbert answered, without lifting her eyes from the piece of fancy-work her fingers were busy upon.

"Herbert Raymond is one of nature's true noblemen. He is also very talented and ambitious, and will, if he lives long enough, make his mark in the world," Mr. Gilbert continued enthusiastically.

"I hope so," was all the reply she dared trust herself to make.

The banker got up, lit a fresh cigar, and sitting down

again, said thoughtfully between the puffs of smoke slowly leaving his lips :

“ I do not know much about the boy’s ancestry. I have never heard any one mention his mother or his maternal relatives. I was favorably impressed with his father, however, although I saw but little of him during his stay in this city. I made several attempts to cultivate his acquaintance further but failed.”

Mrs. Gilbert made no answer to his observations, and by and by the banker continued :

“ I surmised Dr. Raymond to be a wealthy man, but I was a little surprised when he consulted me in regard to the betrothal between Ruth and his son, to hear that Herbert’s own private fortune which his father had set aside for him when he attained his majority, to be over one hundred thousand dollars. This sum, with what I shall be able to give the girl as a marriage portion, will make the young people quite independent.”

Mrs. Gilbert bent her head very low over an intricate stitch in her embroidery, but still no syllable, or monosyllable escaped her lips.

The banker at length took his cigar from his mouth, and holding it between his fingers asked :

“ Leah, how does it happen that, unwomanlike, you are allowing me to do all the talking this evening ? ”

She looked up from her work and laughed :

“ It is because I do not happen to be in a talkative mood, I suppose,” she said, while she felt the color stealing guiltily into her face, under the scrutiny of his laughing eyes.

“Well, I know that your silence is not attributable to a lack of interest in the subject, for was there ever a woman so untrue to the tradition of her sex, as not to be interested in a prospective wedding! What will you say, little mother, when I tell you that by your gracious consent we will, in all probability, have a double wedding at the villa before the year has closed?”

She dropped her work now and looked up at him with wonder in her eyes.

“A double wedding?” she asked in surprise.

“Yes. To-day Frank Foster called upon me at my office and asked Esther’s hand of me in marriage.”

“Is it possible?” she exclaimed. “I had no idea that he had even won the girl’s heart.”

“Nor I. I thought for some time that Herbert Raymond was in love with her, and would be her choice between the two,” he returned.

Was it his imagination or did his wife’s cheeks turn white as the petals of an ascension lily, as she dropped her eyes suddenly again upon her work.

“Does the prospect of losing both our daughters at one time distress you so much?” he asked kindly. “If so Esther is young enough to wait another year.”

“It will be very hard to see them leave our home for homes of their own at any time,” she answered, with tears in her voice.

“Still they must go sooner or later,” he rejoined. “Frank Foster’s home is in this city, so we shall not be separated from Esther by distance at any rate, and although Ruth’s

home will be in New York, this distance is easily accomplished nowadays."

So after considerably more discussion of the important coming events, it was settled that there would be a grand double wedding at Myrtle Villa early in the coming winter.

When the season had advanced into the first days of summer, Mr. and Mrs. Gilbert and their lovely daughters, following the usual custom of the family, repaired to a delightful resort in the north, and later on their party was increased by the appearance of the two happy young men, who would, ere long claim the banker's daughters as their own fair brides.

Dr. Raymond had gone to Europe for an indefinite stay, and it was stated, much to Mr. Gilbert's surprise, that he would not return to witness his son's nuptials.

"That man is growing into a regular misanthrope," the banker remarked to his wife when he heard the news.

The summer, freighted with happiness for the two pairs of betrothed lovers, flew quickly past on rosy wings, bringing the day speedily when the Southerners were again at Myrtle Villa, busy in preparations for the double wedding, which was now only a few days distant.

To illustrate how well Herbert Raymond had kept the oath made to his father on that memorable day, and his subsequent promise to his mother; be it said that during all these summer days of intimacy, with the banker and his family, the young man let fall no word, nor was he ever betrayed into any action or expression of affection for his mother, dearly as he loved her, that would excite the least

suspicion as to any unusual relations existing between the banker's wife and himself.

Truly, Leah's son had proven himself to be a loyal custodian of the heart secret, with which his parents had intrusted him.

The wedding day—the brightest and most beautiful possible even in this sunny clime—dawned and passed away, with all the merry ringing of wedding-bells, display of bridal finery, blushing brides, tears, kisses and congratulations usual upon such occasions, a description of which would only be the repeating of an oft-told tale.

Leah, who had all day long hoped and prayed for at least one moment's private speech with her son, was beginning to despair that the opportunity would present itself, when just before the departure of the bridal couples for their wedding journey, and while the house was still filled with guests, she, stepping into the library, intent upon some small errand, found it deserted by all except her son.

He had changed his wedding outfit for a traveling suit, and stood under the soft light of the chandelier, busy making entries in his memoranda. The blinds were all closed and the curtains tightly drawn.

"Are you alone, Herbert?" she whispered.

"Quite alone, dear mother," he answered in the same low tone.

She hastily turned the key in the door, and rushed into his outstretched arms with a smothered cry of joy.

"Thank heaven! I may at last call you mother," the young man murmured, as he fondly embraced her.

She returned his caresses and called down Heaven's choicest blessings upon him and his wedded love.

"How far beyond my deserts have I been blessed!" she exclaimed. "In all my past dreary contemplations of the future after I surrendered you to your father's care, never one ray of hope came that I should be reunited with my son. In what an extraordinary manner has the good God brought about this reunion, and still permitted me to retain my honored position and good name before the world."

As she spoke she drew from the bosom of her satin bodice a slender golden chain, which, securely attached to her dress, had been hidden from sight. As she detached and drew it forth, a brilliant solitaire diamond ring flashed forth its prismatic rays in the soft light. She unclasped the tiny chain, and, slipping off the ring, pressed it to her lips a moment, while tears started from her eyes.

"It was your father's gift to me, my darling," she said in a choking voice. "He slipped it upon my finger in the presence of the man of God, while his dear lips murmured: 'With this ring, I thee wed, and with all my worldly goods I thee endow.' Oh, day of exquisite happiness, how very, very far down the dimmed and tear-washed aisles of the past it now appears! All these years, my precious boy, this ring has lain next my heart, and now it is your mother's wedding gift to you."

She slipped the glittering gem upon the last finger of his left hand, as she spoke, and he, bending over it, said with deep emotion:

"Precious gift, hallowed forever by the touch of my dear

mother's hand, made sacred by the most holy associations of the day that bound my parents' hearts as one, typifying as it does the endless happiness in store for them, when all the mistakes and mists of life are caught up and dispelled in the bright light of Eternity's dawn. Ever be my talisman ; and when the finger upon which, in life, it was worn, is cold in death, may the still sparkling gem symbolize the undying love I ever cherished for my beloved parents."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

“There is a calm that comes at evening,
When the weary day is o’er,
That is soothing as the lullaby
From mother’s song of yore.
What, though the day be dreary,
We will forget it all
In the calm that comes at evening,
When the twilight shadows fall.”

THE snow and ice of mid-winter lay upon the low brick house, and hung in glittering pendants from the leafless trees surrounding the house that had been Leah Mansden’s childhood’s home.

The day was sparkling bright and cold. The smoke from the chimneys of the old house, standing far back from the street, trembled in plain straight lines in the cold, clear atmosphere, making a strong contrast to the dome of blue ether above.

A flock of tiny snow-birds, hopping and chirruping about the small white gate leading to the ground inclosing the house, rose and sailed away on swift, silent wings as a slender female figure clad in deep widow’s weeds, approached and laid one of her gloved hands on the rusty gate-latch.



“Martha Moore stood in the yard with a bright tin pan in her hands.”

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The face of the newcomer was pale and worn with sorrow, and belonged to a woman whose age was nearing the meridian of life. It was, however, a beautiful and interesting face, and one that would command more than a casual glance from its beholder.

The lady entered the gate, and following the path made between the huge banks of snow, piled high on either side, walked with erect carriage and downcast eyes to the back of the house.

Martha Moore stood in the yard with a bright tin-pan in her hand, from which she was feeding a large flock of chickens, which clustered around her feet, or flew upon her shoulders in their tame eagerness for their morning meal.

When the black-robed figure stood looking at her with pathetic, violet eyes, the woman gave one startled and bewildered glance into them, and then, dropping her pan and scattering the chickens right and left, she gave vent to a joyful cry as she clasped the returned wanderer in her motherly arms crying :

“Leah, Leah ! my darling child, have you returned to me at last ?”

“Yes, Martha, after the trials, storms, temptations and sins of almost a quarter of a century, I have returned to you, my more than mother, and all I crave is to be permitted to spend the remainder of my days with you in the sweet seclusion of the house that witnessed my birth, and sheltered me in the days of my happy childhood.”

After many tears, embraces, and thankful ejaculations for the return of her foster-child, Martha almost carried the

nearly exhausted lady into the genial warmth of the comfortable, and well-kept old house.

Divesting her of her somber wrappings she placed her in a large chintz-covered chair beside the fire, roaring in the brightly polished stove.

"I have so much to tell you, Martha," she said, with a smile so sorrowfully pathetic, it brought the tears to Martha's eyes.

"You must tell me nothing, my darling, until you are thoroughly warmed and rested and have partaken of breakfast."

With these words the good woman hurried away, and soon returned bearing a tempting meal smoking on a tray, from which the weary traveler made a refreshing repast.

Then, and not until then, would Martha permit the lady to speak of her past life, after she herself had returned to their western home long years ago.

With tears often flowing from her kind eyes, Martha listened while Leah related all except one of the important and wonderful events which had occurred in her life since her separation from her old and faithful friend.

At the close of her narrative, Leah sat with head leaning wearily back against the bright chintz cushion of the chair.

Her eyes were closed, and she sat in rapt thought.

The long silence which had fallen between the two was at last broken by Martha, saying in a low trembling voice :

"Leah, my darling, you are a widow. Your apparel and sad face tell me that this is true, although you have not mentioned your bereavement."

She raised her head and looked at Martha a moment in pitiful silence and then said sadly :

“ Yes, Martha, I am a widow, and God help me ! The man who showered such a wealth of tender devotion upon me, died, when apparently in the best of health, leaving me not only heart-broken from my sudden bereavement, but bowed down into the very dust with undying remorse for the deception I had practiced upon him, and for which I never had strength of character sufficient to beg his forgiveness. “ Oh, Martha, Martha ! ” and the deep violet eyes shone with a dry, unnatural luster, as the widow looked imploringly into her friend’s sympathetic face. “ Think you not that now, when, with the clear vision of immortality he knows the enormity of my crime, he does not despise and loathe me ? ”

“ Neither hatred, malice, uncharitableness, nor any carnal passion can enter the kingdom of God, my poor child,” Martha returned in a comforting voice. If Mr. Colburn in his home in heaven is permitted by the good God to know of the deception you practiced upon him, the same kind Father will permit him to understand the trials which led you to yield to the temptation, and all you suffered subsequently in consequence. Then fear not that the spirit of ‘ a just man made perfect,’ will prove to be more unforgiving than spirits who still inhabit tabernacles of clay.”

As Martha comforted and sustained the deserted young wife during her early trials, she now comforted and sustained the sorrowing woman in her widowhood. Talking and rea-

soning with her until the spirit of morbid remorse which lashed her soul with whips of torture, was lulled to rest.

After Mr. Gilbert's death, a will had been produced by his business attorney, which had been placed in his hands several years prior to the gentleman's decease, in which his dearly beloved wife, Leah Gilbert, and his two daughters Ruth and Esther, were named as sole and jointly equal legatees.

Yielding to her mother's earnest solitations, Esther and her young husband had taken up their residence at Myrtle Villa, while Herbert and Ruth resided at their New York home.

No nun, in peaceful seclusion behind convent walls, ever lived more quietly, or apart from the world, than did Mrs. Gilbert in the cloister-like retirement of her western home.

In vain her children implored her to return to her southern home.

She was more contented in her present place of abode, she told them, than she could be in any other place ; and reluctantly they let her have her way.

The second year of her widowhood had advanced into the long bright summer days, and Leah walked daily with Martha about the little farm and garden, taking a lively interest in the growing crops, horses, cows, and poultry. She went nowhere, except to church, unless it was to visit some case of charity which had been made known to Martha.

At the beginning of the second year of her return to the west, yielding to Martha's sensible advice, she had laid aside her deep mourning robes.

With the resumption of a lighter and more cheerful attire, Leah's health and spirits improved, and her life, although very, very quiet, was tranquil.

It had grown into a habit with her to often repair to the old trysting place of her young lover and herself, and there spend hours under the grateful coolness of the green trees, either reading or watching the feathered songsters as they flitted busily among the green branches, or letting her eyes follow the course of the clear brook, which babbled and sang merrily on its way.

One bright morning in early September, taking a book in which she was deeply interested, she repaired to this favorite spot, and sitting down on a grassy knoll near the water's edge, was soon absorbed in the contents of the volume.

She was dressed in a pale lavender silk, which fitted her form to perfection. Her face had regained much of the healthful color that tinged it in the long ago.

Her hat lay on the grass by her side, and her hair was pushed loosely and carelessly back from her low broad brow, as she bent in absorbing interest over the open pages lying in her lap.

Presently her small fox-terrier, which had followed its mistress, and lay sleeping near her feet, raised its head and growled.

"Lie still, Carl," she said, without lifting her eyes.

Instead of obeying the command, however, the little animal sprang up and broke into a succession of shrill loud barks.

Mrs. Gilbert rose to her feet, and looking to see what disturbed the dog, saw, standing under the dim shadows of the mass of foliage, on a line with herself and not three feet away, Dr. Raymond.

Her recognition of him was instantaneous. She dropped her book, advanced a few steps towards him, and held out her hands; the next instant, with a glad cry of joy, he had her in his arms, and was covering her face with kisses.

When they had both grown calmer they sat down on the grassy bank, which happened to be the very spot where their early love vows had been plighted, and there had a long, earnest conversation, as became their mature years, and the trials through which they had passed.

We will not listen, however, to the import of their conversation. We can easily surmise what it was, so come away with me, dear reader, and leave them in peace.

"Stop a moment," you protest, "Mrs. Gilbert has made a remark that has brought the smiles to her companion's face."

"You seem to forget, Herbert," she said, deprecatingly, "that I am an old woman now."

"An old woman, darling? How absurd! What if there are a few threads of silver in your hair, you are far more beautiful to me now than you ever were. Look at myself," he continued, "and you will see that time in its onward flight has not, by any means, passed me by untouched. What of that? Why should we not spend the remainder of our days together? Come with me, beloved, and let this happy hour restore to me the lost happiness of my youth," he pleaded.



“Dr. Raymond led Leah into the old red brick house.”—Page 249.

Without another word Leah picked up her hat, and, placing it upon her head, took his arm, and slowly they left the shadowed coolness of the fragrant woods, and bent their footsteps toward the little church, now beautified and enlarged, where first they breathed their nuptial vows.

When the golden September sun hung midway in the cloudless sky, Dr. Raymond led Leah into the old red brick house, where Martha was beginning to wonder and fret over her long absence, and presented her to the astonished woman as his newly-wedded wife.

Three happy weeks were passed by the reunited husband and wife in the beautiful seclusion of the old home, and then, returning to St. Augustine they took up their abode at the Spanish Castle."

Ere long, they were joined by Herbert Raymond and his charming young wife, and then Leah's happiness was complete.

It was a matter of great wonder to Esther that her mother could never be induced to come to Myrtle Villa, not for even one day's visit.

"It must be that she loved dear papa so fondly, that she cannot bear to remain long in the house which was their home during the happy years of their wedded life," the young wife said confidentially, to her husband and sister Ruth.

"This may be her reason for declining to spend at least part of the season with you," Ruth replied thoughtfully, "or perhaps she cannot endure to visit the scene of his sudden death. Just think of the terrible shock to her when she

found him sitting dead from heart failure in my mother's study, with his poor head resting on her desk, while we were absent on our wedding journey. That the shock of the discovery did not kill her is marvelous."

THE END.

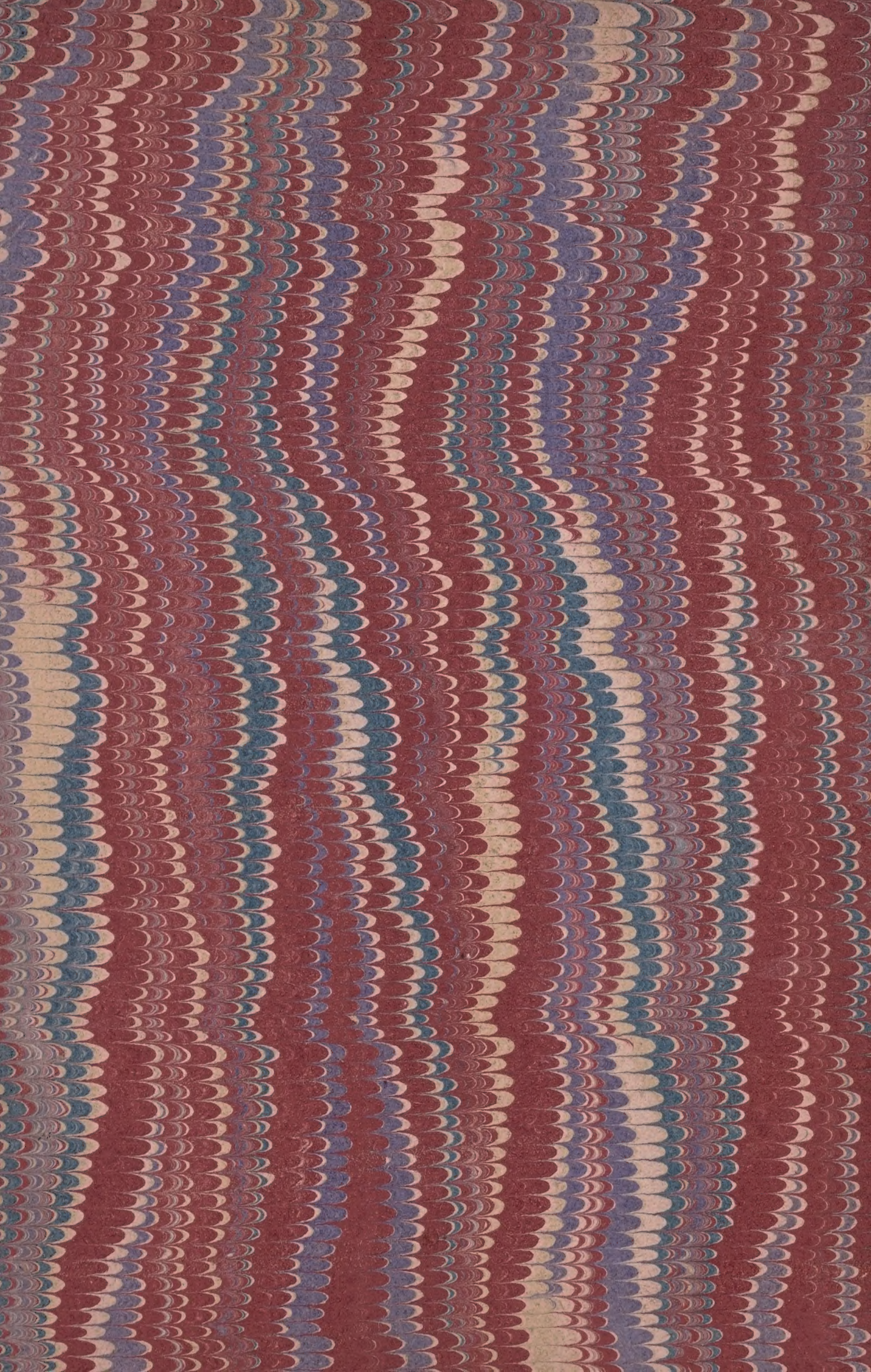
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